FRANZ OVERBECK

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

AND THE COMMITTEE ON THE GRADUATE DIVISION

OF STANFORD UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Robert Boice Luehrs

August 1968

I certify that I have read this thesis and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Gordon A. Craig

I certify that I have read this thesis and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Paul A. Robinson

I certify that I have read this thesis and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Claude A. Buss

Approved for the University Committee on the Graduate Division:

Virgil K. Whitaker
Dean of the Graduate Division

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

INTRODUCTION 1

PART I. OVERBECK'S LIFE

Chapter

I. CHILDHOOD AND STUDENT YEARS 13

II. FRIENDSHIP WITH TREITSCHKE 32

III. FRIENDSHIP WITH NIETZSCHE 62

IV. LATER LIFE 95

PART II. OVERBECK'S CONCEPTION OF HISTORY, CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

V. BASIC PRINCIPLES 116

VI. CHRISTIANITY AND HISTORY 137

VII. CHRISTIANITY AND THEOLOGY 179

VIII. CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE 217

BIBLIOGRAPHY 225

INTRODUCTION

The overriding cultural and intellectual phenomenon of the modern age, according to Friedrich Nietzsche, is the death of God and the concomitant erosion of the efficacy of Christianity. Despite the impression frequently provided by historians, Nietzsche was not the originator and propagator of this shrewd diagnosis of the condition of contemporary society. A decade before his parable of the madman, the mathematician William Kingdon Clifford wrote of the generation which has "felt with utter loneliness that the Great Companion is dead."[1] What is probably more to the point, Nietzsche's precursor Max Stirner recorded in 1845 how "man has killed God in order to become now 'sole God on high,'"[2] and the concept appeared even earlier in Heine and Hegel.

Nietzsche, then, was not assuming the role of prophet, perversely denying what was customarily believed, but accepting an observation of some standing. Beneath the superficial characteristics of the nineteenth century -- the liberal optimism, the supposition of Darwinian progress, the positivistic certitude -- lay precisely a

---

[1] W. K. Clifford, Lectures and Essays, II (London: Macmillan and Co., 1901), p. 250.

[2] Max Stirner, Der Einzige und sein Eigentum (Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1901), p. 158.

peculiarly contemporary truth: man, by destroying his own belief in God, had also destroyed the basis for all certainty. The old order was readily being broken down but from the rubble no new one emerged. All that continued to exist was disintegration, pathology, anxiety, estrangement, and the growing sense of an approaching apocalypse. The original confidence in the ability of unfettered human rationality to construct something better than the superstition and ignorance of the past ultimately produced only a mounting cacophony of dissolving creeds and competing ideologies. Ultimately there are three possible resolutions: retention of the old assumptions ignoring, somewhat hypocritically, the difficulties involved; seizure of any belief which promises to end the anarchy; or pure skepticism.

It is under these sorts of conditions that social critics thrive, and the nineteenth century engendered more than its share of intellectuals and publicists who were prepared both to catalog the evidences of pretension, shallowness and deceit which abounded and to offer prescriptions. Often enough the worth of their observations was marred by the same diseases they were so assiduously endeavoring to cure in others. The more discerning critics attempted to come to terms with their own personal limitations in addition, gaining the sort of insight that permitted an analysis of contemporary life which was at once more immediate and more profound, and more universal. Herein lies a major difference between two critical treatises that appeared in 1873, Paul de Lagarde's Über das Verhältnis des deutschen Staates zu Theologie, Kirche, und Religion (Concerning the Relation-

ship of the German States to Theology, Church, and Religion) and the first part of Nietzsche's Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen (Thoughts out of Season), the essay on David Friedrich Strauss.

Sensitive to the fact that Christianity was under attack from internal theological divisions as well as from external radical Hegelianism, Lagarde repudiated both the existing confessions and traditional Christian dogma in the name of a new, purified, heroic faith which would be appropriate to the German character and form the spiritual foundations for a new German state. Nietzsche's essay was broader in scope, a sarcastic and telling attack on the Germany that had emerged from the war with France, self-satisfied, arrogant and intellectually void; as the focus for this barbed critique he chose an idolized hero of the day, the author of Das Leben Jesu (The Life of Jesus), whose new book Der alte und der neue Glaube (The Old and New Faith) which had appeared the previous year was a comfortable and unreflective affirmation of Darwin against Christianity. In Strauss Nietzsche found the embodiment of the pomposity and hollowness of modern times.

There was yet another book of this nature that year by a third German outsider, Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie (Concerning the Christianity of our Modern Theology); the author was Nietzsche's friend and colleague at the University of Basel, the church historian Franz Overbeck. Although his subject matter was closer to that of Lagarde and the introduction of his work gave

acknowledgement to Lagarde's pioneering efforts,[3] Overbeck was much closer in spirit to Nietzsche's cosmopolitan and skeptical outlook than to Lagarde's narrow, crippled, prejudiced one. However, although he was no victim of what Fritz Stern has called "the politics of cultural despair," neither was he as ambitious as Nietzsche, whose ultimate concern was the discovery of a new basis for human values. Overbeck's Christlichkeit avoided the social and cosmological implications of the questions with which it concerned itself. The author's objective was simple: to point out that because theologians insist on introducing the world and the rational mentality that is part of it into religion, which would be otherworldly and sustained by faith alone, theology is antiChristian to the core and even the science par excellence of Nietzsche's cultural philistines.

Overbeck's scope remained limited to the interrelationship of Christianity and modern culture as well as his own relationship to both; yet, in many respects, he was more radical than Nietzsche. An unbeliever who never suffered Nietzsche's agonies in contriving a break from Christianity, he nonetheless spent twenty-seven years as a professor of church history and the New Testament. He denied theology the right to speak for religions, and, in so doing, he denied himself the same right. He did not ultimately possess the systematizing impulse of a philosopher; he was an aristocratic scholar who dispassionately chronicled the death throes of a two thousand year old faith without a twinge of either satisfaction or regret. An academician,

---

[3] Overbeck, Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie (Leipzig: C. G. Naumann, 1903), p. ix.

largely removed and isolated by geographic location and by occupation from the actuality of modern development, he embodied the irreconcilable paradoxes of the contemporary mind.

He was quite conscious of belonging to a new sort of historical epoch and toyed with the idea of calling his intended autobiography Confessions of a Man of My Time.[4] That he never fell into cynical resignation or an existential "leap into faith" was due to his all-pervasive skepticism, what he called "indolence of mind," and, above all, to the desire for absolute intellectual honesty, the pursuance of questions to their ultimate conclusions without fear or bias. It was precisely this distance and balance, this decision to work out his own salvation by contemplation, that makes Overbeck's line of thought so fascinating to trace, not only intrinsically but also for the sort of evaluation it makes of the present.

However, relatively few efforts of this nature have been made. The last full-length study of Overbeck was published by Walter Nigg more than thirty-five years ago,[5] and the only significant discussion extant in English is a short chapter in the recent translation of Karl Löwith's Von Hegel zu Nietzsche (From Hegel to Nietzsche),[6] a discussion based primarily on Nigg, at that. This neglect is hardly

---

[4] Franz Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, edited by Eberhard Vischer (Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1941), p. 146.

[5] Franz Overbeck: Versuch einer Würdigung (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1931).

[6] Translated by David E. Green (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1967), pp. 374-385. Ironically, the index confuses his name with a Pre-Raphaelite painter of the previous generation, Johann Friedrich Overbeck.

surprising. Theologians generally comprehend that Overbeck was a purely negative and corrosive spirit within their discipline and are content to dismiss him, as Ernst Troeltsch has done, as an aberration, a misanthropic despiser and mouthpiece for "Feuerbach-Nietzsche" atheism.[7] Those like Adolf von Harnack and Karl Barth who have wished to metamorphose Overbeck's major concepts, particularly his historical approach and notion of Urchristentum, into bulwarks for new theologies have only indulged in futility.

In the last decade of his life Overbeck repeatedly denied Harnack any pretension to discipleship and composed polemical attacks against this theological master's reputation for profound scholarship. Most certainly Barth would have fared no better at his hands. It is impossible for any serious theologian to come to terms with a man who, while professionally standing within the camp, insisted on stripping the discipline of all status and reducing it to a subsidiary branch of institutional history. It is much easier to ignore him. In a study of modern Protestant theology recently published from his papers, Paul Tillich briefly gives Overbeck credit for posing the most crucial questions about religion but then pursues the matter no further, apparently content to let him stand as a forerunner of Barth's neo-orthodoxy.[8] Theologians are much better equipped to

---

[7] Ernst Troeltsch, Gesammelte Schriften, III: Der Historismus und seine Probleme, Book I: Das logische Problem der Geschichtsphilosophie (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1922), p. 497, footnote 260.

[8] Paul Tillich, Perspectives on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Protestant Theology (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 6-7.

handle a radical Christian like Kierkegaard or even a radical anti-Christian like Nietzsche than a dispassionate nonChristian like Overbeck.

Part of Overbeck's misfortune has always been that, generally speaking, only theologians have bothered to give him any attention at all. Historians and philosophers have tended to reduce him to the minor position of Nietzsche's adjunct. To be sure, the apparent commonplace of his life, the remoteness of his historical interest, and his indifference toward transmitting his views to others -- a project which very likely would have required him to abandon solid research for more speculative heights -- have all combined to reduce sharply his attractiveness as a candidate for independent treatment.

He published little: about one hundred book reviews, the major portion of them in the Literarisches Centralblatt; a few selections in Daniel Schenkel's Bibel-Lexikon; approximately a dozen articles and essays on church history; and, outside of his dissertation, only four books, including his Streit und Friedensschrift of 1873, which he reissued with a new introduction and afterward in 1903. This was all. When his retirement from teaching in 1896 provided the opportunity for him to engage in a full-scale campaign against modern theology, his physical strength no longer permitted it. He could only stockpile the necessary ammunition in his notebooks and indulge in what has proven to be a vain hope that after his death someone might carry the project to fruition. His literary style was difficult, ugly and graceless, proceeding through labyrinths of subordinate clauses and qualifying statements, concerned solely with

content; it reflected not only the essentially soliloquizing nature of his works and the tortuous character of his mental processes but also Overbeck's contempt for journalistic popularization. It was, as Overbeck once noted, a style that had "lived and suffered."[9]

The basic reason why Overbeck was not totally forgotten after his death in 1905 was that the church historian Carl Albrecht Bernoulli, a student of Overbeck but by no means his disciple, took the literary remains in hand and from time to time published selections from them. The most notable of these posthumous books appeared in 1919 under the title of Christentum und Kultur: Gedanken und Anmerkungen zur modernen Theologie (Christianity and Culture: Thoughts and Notes on Modern Theology).[10] Intended as a companion piece to Christlichkeit, it strung together fragmentary observations Overbeck had made on a whole spectrum of topics into a comprehensible format. Unfortunately for the value of the publications which appeared after 1905, Bernoulli took his office as editor somewhat too seriously. In conjunction with Ida Overbeck, the widow, he subjected the material to extensive stylistic revision and abridgement and rearranged it, adding entirely new connective passages. A comparison of Bernoulli's version of Overbeck's autobiography, appended to his edition of the Overbeck translation of Clement of Alexandria's Stromateis, with the later Selbst-

---

[9] Overbeckiana: Übersicht über den Franz-Overbeck-Nachlass der Universitätsbibliothek Basel, Part II: Der wissenschaftliche Nachlass Franz Overbecks, edited by Martin Tetz (Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1962), p. 31.

[10] Basel: Benno Schwabe.

bekenntnisse, edited by Eberhard Vischer, provides some conception of the sort of alterations Bernoulli introduced -- as does, even more patently, collation of passages in Christentum und Kultur with the original papers.[11] The foregoing observation is not meant to suggest that Overbeck suffered the same fate at the hands of his literary executors as did Nietzsche, but merely to provide evidence for the necessity of circumspection when the attempt is made to fit the Bernoulli editions into the general pattern of Overbeck's life.

Bernoulli also wrote his own biography of Overbeck in 1908,[12] the first and in many respects still the best. It was a two volume study which not only provided the fundamental outline of Overbeck's life and works as suggested by Overbeck's papers and Bernoulli's memory but also explored Nietzsche's intellectual development, particularly as it was interpreted by Overbeck. As a result, it is an invaluable source for Overbeck's correspondence and those compositions which Overbeck had completed during his returement for future publication. Since Overbeck's evaluation of Nietzsche proved to be quite cognizant of the latter's weaknesses as well as his strengths, and since Bernoulli tried to maintain this objectivity in his own conclusions, the biography precipitated a virulent and protracted feud with Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche, whose Nietzsche Archive was more interested in bearing witness to the philosopher's infallibility and sanctity. The principal drawback to Bernoulli's book is that the

---

[11] See: Overbeckiana, II, pp. 17-25, 101.

[12] Franz Overbeck und Friedrich Nietzsche: Eine Freundschaft (Jena: Eugen Diederichs).

heavy emphasis it puts on discussing Nietzsche's ideas leads to a slighting of those perceptions evolved by Overbeck which do not bear direct relation to this purpose; in the scope of his conclusions about Overbeck Bernoulli scarcely moved beyond the article he had written on his former teacher for the Basler Jahrbuch two years before.[13] Clearly more work is justified on this entire subject.

This study proceeds from a nontheological standpoint. It is assumed that Overbeck's analysis of Christianity and its historical disintegration as well as the method by which he reached his insights are worthy of serious discussion despite his lack of allies or measurable influence, even because of these characteristics. Where the appearance of new source material, particularly Overbeck's autobiography, and reevaluation of old seem to warrant, revisions of certain points made by Bernoulli and Nigg will be proposed. Even so, the interpretations offered must necessarily be considered tentative and, in a sense, preliminary; much of the large collection of Overbeck's manuscripts at the University of Basel remains unread and unappraised.

Contrary to the prevailing practice in works of this nature, the following pages strike a generally equal balance between the consideration of Overbeck's life and that of his thought, rather than abbreviating the biographical portion in the assumption that it has relatively little significance for purely intellectual matters. Overbeck's life is worth this much attention not only because of his

---

[13] "Franz Overbeck," Basler Jahrbuch (1906), pp. 136-192.

remarkable friendships with two such disparate spirits as Treitschke and Nietzsche, but also because of his conviction that the validity of a particular Weltanschauung can be demonstrated only through the actions of its proponent in the world. Accordingly, the investigation of the content of Overbeck's writings is largely postponed until after the exposition of his childhood, education and academic career, all of which might be considered as both the background and expression of his attitudes.

By and large, Overbeck will be treated as a historian and social critic rather than as a point at which certain movements within theology culminated; thus he will not emerge from this study as a surreptitious vehicle for a broad description of the progress of Protestant theology in the nineteenth century. The focus will remain the man himself, the particular questions to which he devoted his thought and life, and the extent to which these solutions underwent subsequent elaboration or modification. Nor will Overbeck be used as a foundation upon which to construct a comprehensive analysis of fin de siècle intellectual history. However, in order to place Overbeck better within the context of his times and to understand the character of his approach, comparisons will be drawn between him and some of his contemporaries whose interests touched upon his own, particularly Nietzsche. It is hoped that the result will be a contribution toward the better comprehension of a man who was representative of some of the most original thinking of his era, a man whose time is most likely yet to come.

PART ONE

OVERBECK'S LIFE

I. CHILDHOOD AND STUDENT YEARS

Karl Löwith has written:

> Philosophical criticism of the Christian religion began in the nineteenth century with Hegel and reached its climax with Nietzsche. It is a Protestant movement, and therefore specifically German; this holds true of both the criticism and the religion at which it was directed. Our critical philosophers were all theologically educated Protestants and their criticism of Christianity presupposes its Protestant manifestations.[1]

He might have added, as Karl Barth has done,[2] that the process by which man has experienced philosophic liberation from God was a particularly Lutheran phenomenon.

With this broad characterization established, the temptation is great to press the analysis further. By positing a type of "critical personality," formed by particular type of childhood and environmental experiences and manifesting itself through unusual or abnormal personality traits and ways of thinking, it would be possible to make this iconoclastic attitude more comprehensible and even to predict which individuals would be likely to have it. In his study of Lagarde, Langbehn and Moeller van den Bruck, Fritz Stern

---

[1] From Hegel to Nietzsche, p. 323.

[2] Peter L. Berger, "Demythologization - Crisis in Continental Theology," in W. Warren Wagar, editor, European Intellectual History Since Darwin and Marx (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 254-256.

outlined the qualities which underlay this "critical type,"[3] among them: an urban childhood marked by tragedy, harshness, and the lack of a warm relationship with parents; violent repudiation of the family's traditional Lutheranism; the rejection of professional aspirations in favor of a life as a free intellectual, although this life is coupled with hatred of traditional education and pedantry; and, finally, an inability either to accept society or to achieve satisfactory relationships with women.

The "outstanding characteristics" of this type, according to Stern, are "isolation, alienation, and self-hatred." In general, he acknowledges the similarity of his diagnosis to that of the potential fascist offered by T. W. Adorno in The Authoritarian Personality.[4] However, these characteristics are just as typical of such non-authoritarian critics as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, whom Stern excludes from his "cultural types," and this same analysis could be as easily presented as a significant background for their mental development, also.[5] Even granting the truth of the Freudian dictum that the child is the father of the man, the interrelationship is clearly more complex than a one-to-one connection between origins and ideas.

---

[3] The Politics of Cultural Despair (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), especially pp. 325-350.

[4] Ibid., pp. 334-335.

[5] On Nietzsche, see, for example, the books of Erich F. Podach: Nietzsches Zusammenbruch (Heidelberg: Kampmann, 1930); Gestalten um Nietzsche (Weimar: Lichtenstein, 1932); and Nietzsche und Lou Salome (Zurich: Niehans, 1938).

In fact, Overbeck, who stood with Nietzsche on the furthermost extremities of the critique of Christianity,[6] shared in none of the above properties with the exception of an urban birth and the sense of being alien to his surroundings. The second attribute was perhaps due less to an opposition to the complexities of modernity and a nostalgia for the bucolic past than to a growing sense of being a cosmopolitan in an age of nationalism or an anchorite among mass-men. He was what Nietzsche called a "good European;" in this respect, he resembled nothing so much as a cultured German of the previous century. Indeed, at the end of his life, Overbeck wrote: " Perhaps I am in fact less at home and in my element in the present. I have, at least, often a vivid feeling I would have felt better in the eighteenth century and its awakening of humanity, in it sentimentalism and the profound estrangement from Christianity which was connected with it."[7]

It was at the beginning of the eighteenth century the the Overbeck family moved from Elberfeld to Frankfurt-am-Main, where, until the French Revolution, they were reasonably prosperous as Lutheran Bürger and merchants. Franz Overbeck's grandfather, Johann Jacob, eventually wearied of his subordinate position in the trading firm in which his brother-in-law was a partner, and in 1807 took his

---

[6] One of his colleagues once asserted that Overbeck stood so far to the left that he stood on the right in a new way. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, II, p. 428.

[7] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, p. 167.

wife and sons to London. Johann Jacob became a British citizen through the assistance of the Duke of Sussex, a fellow freemason, opened his own business in the capital, and enjoyed a decade of prosperity. This pleasant existence was terminated abruptly in the depression that followed the Napoleonic wars, and, unable to remain solvent, the Overbecks returned to Frankfurt in 1817.

The situation proved no better in Germany; within a year, encouraged by a younger brother who had had success in Russia, Johann Jacob moved to St. Petersburg, his two eldest sons remaining behind as commercial apprentices and not joining their parents until several years later. During the next fifty years there would be members of the family in Russia, although they evidently avoided assimilation. For all of this, Johann Jacob never did schieve success in St. Petersburg; he went bankrupt again in 1827 and spent the remaining five years of his life in increasing misery until succumbing to a lung disease.

His second son, Franz Heinrich Hermann, did much better, working for various trading companies and finally achieving an income sufficient for the support of a wife. In 1836 he married Johanna Camilla Cercelet, a Catholic and eldest daughter of a Russian-born French merchant whose parents had migrated from Burgundy at the beginning of the revolution.[8] On November 16, 1837, she gave birth to

---

[8] This account of Overbeck's forebears taken from Selbstbekenntnisse, pp. 74-79; cf., C. A. Bernoulli's version in Overbeck's translation of Titus Flavius Clement of Alexandria, Die Teppiche (Basel: Benno Schwabe and Co., 1936), pp. 5-7.

a son, Franz Camill Overbeck, the first of five children.[9]

Overbeck's recollections of his childhood were invariably pleasant; he appreciated the devotion of his mother to her children and credited his father for inspiring his passion for learning.[10] Relations within the family circle were evidently harmonious and close-knit, perhaps necessarily so, since parents and offspring were a nucleus within an alien environment. Religion could have presented an occasion for conflict but clearly did not. As her price for permitting her son to marry, Johann Jacob's widow had extracted the promise that her grandchildren would be raised as Lutherans. However, the religious heterogeneity of the Overbeck household, created not only by Cercelet Catholicism but also by the Anglican tinge of the English background, the presence of a tutor who was a converted Jew, and Franz's later education in the St. Petersburg School of the Reformed Church, prevented the creation of the oppressive, dour Christianity which infested so many German homes in the mid-nineteenth century.[11]

A much more serious problem for Overbeck was the lack of a native tongue. The general household language was French and did not become German until after the birth of the youngest sister, some five

---

[9] The others were Louise (b. 1839), who married an assistant secretary in the Saxon government, Gustav Barchewitz; Ernst (b. 1843), a merchant; Mathilda (b. 1849), who married Hugo Schoenherr, an architect; and Camilla (b. 1855). Another brother, Gustav (b. 1841), died at 7 months.

[10] Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), pp. 137-138. Nigg, Franz Overbeck, pp. 1-2.

[11] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, pp. 80-84.

years after the family had permanently settled in Dresden. Overbeck spoke Russian with the domestics and even knew some English. However, despite the collective efforts of several tutors, until he was thirteen, his German remained rudimentary.[12] He did not develop a real writing style until he was studying at the University of Berlin in 1860-1861 and then, unfortunately, took Schleiermacher as a model. His German prose always remained something that had a vaguely alien flavor for him, something that he seemed continually struggling to subdue. It was a constant source of exasperation for his associates, who claimed not to comprehend why he appeared so incapable of stating his profound learning in the language of Lessing, Schiller and Goethe. Nevertheless, he defended his method of expression vehemently against all reproaches, asserting, with justification, that his own spirit was reflected in its complexities and reservations.[13]

Two other developments during his childhood were of primary

---

[12] Ibid., pp. 83-85, 92-93, 99-101, 107-109.

[13] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 225-227; Nigg, Franz Overbeck, pp. 3, 25-26. Karl Joël found "French irony" in those qualifying clauses that recalled Anatole France. "Franz Overbeck," Die neue Rundschau (1905), p. 1145. Walter Kaufmann probably has a legitimate point when he declares the sacrifice of lucidity to graceless and obscure profundity an occupational hazard of German philosophers and theologians since the time of Kant. From Shakespeare to Existentialism (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1960), pp. 163-165, 313-314. It is paradoxical to find someone such as Karl Jaspers, also a German who came to teach at Basel, criticize Overbeck for the obfuscation of his style so "full of stipulations and reservations, in which no longer anything of consequence was said" and of "contradictions which dialectically remained unresolved." Jaspers, Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophic Activity, translated by Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1965), p. 77.

importance for Overbeck's later life: his shyness and his weak physical constitution. He wrote late in 1897,

> As a child I was extraordinarily plagued by shyness, so much at that time I could have borne a seriously chronic suffering from it had not the conditions of my life otherwise so manifoldly allied and united to cheer my temperament. Also, it remained with me an excessively long time until I overcame the thing and as a result now only have to feel from it a certain awkwardness in intercourse with people.[14]

Three years later, in a less sanguine mood, he penned the following fragment: "Shyness [was] the single plague of my otherwise happy childhood. It not only prevented me from becoming a great man but also to play the role, then be silent."[15]

Of course, he did manage to come to terms with this difficulty in maturity, partially by association with aggressive personalities such as Treitschke and Nietzsche, but it remained a companion to his powerful capacity for analytic introspection and perhaps its cause. Moreover, this element cannot be left out of account when evaluating his attitude toward the demands of his profession, the meagerness of his literary output and his reluctance to propagate or dispute publicly his more controversial and original concepts.

Less intangible in its effects on Overbeck's life was the question of health. For the first decade of his life, Overbeck was a weak child and even though his constitution improved thereafter and he avoided the epidemic diseases of his time, he remained suscep-

---

[14] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, p. 148.

[15] Ibid., pp. 156-157. See also p. 111.

tible to fever and gastric problems.[16] Before he was fifty, he was complaining of "rheumatism,"[17] and deteriorating health forced him to take a leave of absence in 1891-1892, and finally to retire from university teaching four years later, at the age of fifty-nine. Although this escape from an increasingly impossible professional situation was welcome and he had visions of using his leisure for writing -- his projects included historical studies of the Gospel of John, the Middle Ages, and the irrelationship of Christianity and the Germans as well as essays on his friends and the obsolescence of confessional rivalry in the West[18] -- he found himself unable to finish anything, largely because of his physical condition. In the last nine years of his life he published only a second edition of his Christlichkeit and wrote several letters to newspapers, including an open reply to Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche concerning the disposition of his letters from her brother. No wonder Overbeck observed in 1900: "Owing to my entire way of life and my temperament, I have left too much for me to do in old age. Thus I lack the 'joy in old age' of which Nietzsche speaks in Human, All-Too-Human, I, 167 . . ."[19]

---

[16] Ibid., p. 91. For years he bore an open birth injury on his head, and he later supposed this wound had retarded his ability to walk. (Ibid., pp. 80-81)

[17] See Overbeck's letter to Nietzsche of October 24, 1887. Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit Franz Overbeck, edited by Richard Oehler and C. A. Bernoulli (Leipzig: Insel, 1916), p. 400.

[18] Overbeckiana, II, pp. 128-129.

[19] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, p. 156.

It was for reasons of health that in May, 1846, Johanna Overbeck, with her three children in tow, left St. Petersburg to visit her father in Hamburg and the rest of her family in France. Franz was enrolled in the Ancien Collège de St. Germain and when his mother returned with his brother and sister to Russia the next year, he remained in school in France. For two years he was essentially a ward of his mother's sister and of his great-uncle Antoine Cercelet, a perpetual secretary of the chamber of deputies and whose inclinations wavered between St. Simonism and ultramontanism. By far this was the most pleasant of Overbeck's educational experiences, though it was cut short by the revolution in 1848. With his schoolmates he marched under the red flag and sang the Marseillaise, but his parents' concern for his safety, intensified no doubt by the political pedigree of the Cercelets, necessitated his return to St. Petersburg.

Nevertheless, the basic problem remained unsolved. Overbeck's parents had never intended to spend their whole lives in Russia, only to make enough money so that the family could settle in Germany. The state of both their eldest son's health and his education made a final decision ineluctable. It was determined that the family should again split, Overbeck's mother taking the children to Germany and his father following when he could -- four years later, as it turned out. In 1850 Johanna established herself in Dresden, an arbitrary choice based on the advice of family friends, and Franz was sent to the city Gymnasium, the so-called Kreuzschule, which had been founded in the fourteenth century. Under the tutelage of one of the

sixth-formers, the world of German literature finally opened for him and although, by his own estimation an outstanding student only in French, he rose to the level of seventh in a class of forty or fifty. Academic work came to appeal to him and upon his graduation from the Kreuzschule he determined to pursue his studies further at Leipzig, in the theological faculty.[20]

In the last analysis there seems to be no overriding reason why Overbeck chose this particular field. Certainly the selection had nothing to do with family tradition, which was solidly mercantile and only secondarily religious. Overbeck's father had even taken the unusual step of permitting his oldest son perfect freedom in following whatever career his talents suited him for; this was the sort of option that Johann Jacob had not offered.[21] Bernoulli attempted an intricate psychological explanation for this phenomenon, proposing that although the love and happiness Overbeck had experienced as a child within his family made the confort of religion unnecessary, this atmosphere had given him "a sort of prejudice in favor of the Christian religion of love." To test the validity of this prejudice through the methodology of science, he was attracted to the only discipline which would permit this sort of knowledge-seeking. Bernoulli concluded that Overbeck's entrance into theology was the

---

[20] On Overbeck's life between 1846 and 1856, see: Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, pp. 85-110. cf: Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), p. 138; Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 1-3; Nigg, Franz Overbeck, pp. 1-2.

[21] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, pp. 77, 113-114, 163. cf. Bernoulli's discussion in Teppiche, p. 12.

product of a "natural instinct;" he wanted to know more intimately this force which he saw working in the world in which he had grown up.[22]

Overbeck himself was by no means so certain of the motivation which underlay this decision. He expressly avoided dealing with this question in his autobiographical fragment,[23] and later blamed his choice on a "youthful misunderstanding," a nebulous, childish dream to unite a spiritual life with some sort of humanitarian activity.

> In general, I became a theologian with a priestly ideal of the most shallow philanthropism, the sort of ideal as it only emerged out of the mode of thinking at the end of the last century and the beginning of the present one, the nineteenth. It was so weak and lacking in solid foundation that it could not even withstand the experience of my student years.[24]

This analysis is scarcely satisfactory for understanding his motivation, since religious concern and reformist zeal were never determinants in Overbeck's character. Conceivably, however, he has gone into this matter as deeply as can be expected from anyone. As an adolescent deciding on a future profession he might well have thought

---

[22] Teppiche, pp. 14-16.

[23] Selbstbekenntnisse, p. 110; cf., p. 158.

[24] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, pp. 162-163. See also, Ibid., p. 154. Overbeck supposed that, as a child, he must have had some direct connection with religion even though he could no longer recall what this might have been. Otherwise he was at a loss to explain his later interest in theology (Christentum und Kultur, p. 289). This entire development of Overbeck was the antithesis of that once described by Nietzsche: "As children of preachers, a great many German philosophers and academicians had their first view of ministers in childhood and thus ceased to believe in God." See: Ernst Benz, Nietzsches Ideen zur Geschichte des Christentums und der Kirche (Leiden: Brill, 1956), p. 174.

he found inclinations within himself which did not in fact exist and proved himself more driven by the romantic appeal of the unknown than by rational evaluation.

The first of his family to pursue a scholastic career, Overbeck entered the University of Leipzig in the autumn of 1856, not because he was aware of any special merits of that theological faculty but because this was the university of "his" state.[25] The experience was devastating. Moving for the first time outside the family sphere, he found himself isolated, with few companions and no close connections with his professors. Indeed, the unalloyed Lutheranism of the faculty was both unstimulating and unbearable for him. The single influence on his theological education was a book that his father sent him: Zur Geschichte der neuesten Theologie (Toward a History of the Newest Theology) by Carl Schwarz, a professor of theology at Halle.

> Above all, what I owe to Schwarz . . . is the critical disposition toward all living theology in which I fell through the book. However, I account for this result much less out of the connection of his criticism with the bad experience which I personally [had] with my Leipzig theological teachers . . . than out of the connection of the book with the problematic nature of my own relationship to theology at that time. For what stimulus to criticism of an object which one discovers outside of oneself can be compared with the internal stimulus to ask questions about this same object? Thus, to be sure, in the moment when I read Schwarz I was as open as possible for the instruction that things may not be going for the best with the newest theology.[26]

---

[25] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, p. 110.

[26] Ibid., pp. 116-118.

He read with extreme interest what Schwarz had to say about such radical theologians as David Friedrich Strauss, Ferdinand Christian Baur and Richard Rothe.[27] As his second semester at Leipzig drew to a conclusion he even toyed with the idea of going to Heidelberg so that he could study with Rothe, "the single theologian I experienced -- at least by means of his writings -- who personally impressed me, personally attracted me, and won me for his cause through himself."[28]

Instead, his attention was directed to the University of Göttingen, chief among the centers of "modern theology" and rich in resources, including the great Old Testament scholar who held sway there, Heinrich Ewald. He enrolled there in the summer semester of 1857, having lost during his year at Leipzig both his illusions about the possibility of becoming a pastor and the remnants of his childhood religious beliefs. He abandoned permanently his customary nighttime prayers at this point, finding they had lost all significance for him.[29]

From the outset, his studies were achieving for him the insight and knowledge he desired" he was beginning to discover that his own relationship to Christianity was in reality not what he had

---

[27] Martin Tetz, "Über Formengeschichte in der Kirchengeschichte," Theologische Zeitschrift , XVII;6 (November - December, 1961), p. 415. Tetz considers Baur and Rothe as the two models discussed by Schwarz, the one advocating "historical-philosophical" theology and the other "speculative" theology.

[28] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 23.

[29] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, pp. 121-122.

supposed it to be, that Christianity could have importance for him only from the standpoint of a subject for historical research but not as a living belief. For Overbeck this process did not assume the form of some soul-wrenching moral struggle but of a growth to maturity which involved the abandonment of the accouterments of boyhood. This was a gradual self-discovery, part of a developing attitude which sought pure objectivity and pure learning above all. As a student Overbeck had begun to measure his own presuppositions against cold facts and was forced to discard whatever had no basis when scrutinized by an absolutely impartial critique. As he proceeded to examine his religious beliefs rationally, they melted away. It never became necessary for him actually to free himself from Christianity because, as he came to realize more clearly with time, the bonds that held him to religion were only illusory.

Since there was no violence involved in this emergent separation, Overbeck was able to maintain a life-long equanimity with regard to genuine Christianity whenever he discussed the subject. He wrote in 1900:

> Without any hatred directed toward Christianity and without any violent catastrophe which was otherwise felt, I came to the conviction that, as a theologian, I simply undermined the relationship to Christianity which was given to me through the association in which I was placed. I do not know what sort of Christian I would have been if the question of my relationship to Christianity either had never arisen or never had been pursued systematically, that is theologically, by me. However, as the question turned out for me, I made the discovery about my Christianity through it . . . that my knowledge deprived me of my belief.[30]

---

[30] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, pp. 157-158.

This growing recognition that for him Christianity had never developed beyond a "child's belief" continued during his four semesters at Göttingen, as his knowledge of his field increased. Conjoined with this evolution was, as Overbeck noted, "the strengthening of my aversion for all dogmatic theology."[31] Even Ewald proved an extreme disappointment when Overbeck finally mustered sufficient courage to enter the master's course on Job and Solomon. Overbeck gained nothing from this experience except a profound impression of the destructive power of the "monotonous prophet's pathos of the entire Ewald delivery" on whatever subject it touched, even the academic freedom which the old professor so assiduously protected against all governmental intrusion.[32] In retrospect, Overbeck felt that his personal development was advanced much more fully by his membership in the Green Hanoverian Verein, where he was grateful to have contacts with students who were not studying theology.[33]

Returning to Leipzig for his last two years of study, he passed the required examinations without particular difficulty, received his doctorate in April of 1860, and went to study for a year at Berlin, where the spirit of Schleiermacher, in his estima-

---

[31] Ibid., pp. 125-126.

[32] Ibid., p. 124. Along with Georg Gervinus, Friedrich Dahlmann, and the Grimm brothers, Ewald had been one of the "Göttingen Seven," university professors who defied King Ernst Augustus when he abrogated the Hanoverian constitution in 1837. Exiled, Ewald taught at Tübingen until the revolution of 1848 permitted him to return to Göttingen. He was eventually forced into retirement for refusing to take an oath of allegiance to Prussia in 1867.

[33] Ibid., p. 126.

tion, still prevailed.[34] Encounters with Schleiermacher's writings left no visible influences on Overbeck's style of thought, and Overbeck always retained mixed feelings about the man. On the one hand, Overbeck felt Schleiermacher certainly possessed sagacity and a noble spirit. He stood at the threshold of a new era in theology and in learning, even anticipating Overbeck's discussion of the irreconcilability of the Gospel of John with the Synoptic Gospels. On the other hand, Schleiermacher was too much the "model boy" whose "morality lacked the depth of originality." There was too much of the surface glitter about him and too little of substance. Above all, Overbeck could not forgive Schleiermacher's abuse of history, equivocally insisting on the primacy of feeling for religion one instant, attempting to hammer rationalistic criticism into a support for dogmatic presuppositions the next. Like Baur, Overbeck faulted Schleiermacher for positing both an ideal Christ and a historical Jesus and merely assuming rather than demonstrating a connection between the two concepts. "One must esteem him in the highest degree," Overbeck later wrote, "but how can one love him!"[35]

Returning again to Leipzig, Overbeck embarked on a two year program of preparation for his Habilitation, the examination quali-

---

[34] Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), pp. 139-140.

[35] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 3. See also: Overbeck's review of Schleiermacher's Das Leben Jesu in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 42 (October 14, 1865), columns 1105-1108 and Overbeckiana, II, p. 132. On Baur's views concerning Schleiermacher: Peter C. Hodgson, The Formation of Historical Theology: A Study of Ferdinand Christian Baur (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 43-54.

fying him to teach at the university level. Realizing virtually from the beginning of his academic training that he could never take holy orders, he had decided on teaching as the only viable alternative. As he later commented: "As I readily admit, that I never had the slightest call for a Christian clergyman, I doubt just as little that I still have been good enough for a 'modern theologian' . . ."[36] Of course his interest was not in theology per se but in church history, particularly patristic literature -- and that as a student rather than as a teacher. Probably to no other member of his generation did the Protestant injunction of serving God through one's calling seem more like a cruel burlesque.[37] With skepticism leading him into agnosticism, he had chosen a profession by default; he could not think of any other way to make a living except by teaching.

In 1863, Overbeck emigrated to Jena where, sixty-two years before, Hegel had initiated his own career. Within a year Overbeck obtained from the faculty the right to lecture at the university as a Privatdocent by publicly defending eight Latin theses and submitting a Latin dissertation. The second of these obligations he discharged through a short study of the life and literary character of Saint Hippolytus, bishop of Rome in the third century.[38] Actually

---

[36] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, p. 154.

[37] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 288 and Selbstbekenntnisse, pp. 159-160.

[38] Quaestionum Hippolytearum specimen . . . pro gradu licentiati et docendi potestate . . . (Leipzig: Hermann Fritzsche, 1864). There is a description of the research materials used by Overbeck for preparation of his dissertation in Overbeckiana, II, pp. 39-46.

his purpose transcended his stated objective of testing the authenticity of various writings attributed to Hippolytus; he was asserting the superiority of the incisive and critical method of historical research developed by Baur to the nebulous apologetic literature which theologians consistently attempted to fob off on humanity as church history. In particular, Overbeck dissected the improbabilities of Hippolytus und seine Zeit (Hippolytus and His Times), a murky treatise composed by the Prussian diplomat and scholar, Baron Christian Karl von Bunsen, whose politicized Lutheranism embodied those elements Overbeck found the most distasteful in theology. In 1904 Overbeck sarcastically took theologians to task for their neglect of Bunsen:

> Bunsen, with his work God in History and the Biblical studies connected with it, is the theological master who circulated the shortest and most pregnant formula for the central dogma of our modern theology. For God in history (this the title of Bunsen's three volumes, Leipzig, 1857-1858) that would say, if anything at all, nothing else than that history is the means through which God reveals himself to us men . . . Bunsen also, as favorite and as diplomat of his king, has best established the prototype or exhibited in advance the relationship in which, at present, the German Empire under Prussian leadership stands with reference to modern theology.[39]

Overbeck's display of learning and ability was convincing. He was licensed to teach New Testament exegesis and church history and, in November, began lecturing on the Pastoral Epistles[40] twice a week to an audience of five.[41] He had reached this point of transition

---

[39] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 18.

[40] First and Second Timothy and Titus.

[41] Letter from Overbeck to Treitschke, November 9, 1864, in Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 8.

between student and teacher without having studied under any particular professor. He never came in contact with the two scholars he most admired, Baur and Rothe. Baur had died while Overbeck was in Berlin, and Rothe lived only until 1867. By far the most important personal influence which was exerted on Overbeck's intellectual evolution during the 1860's came from outside the discipline of theology entirely, from his close friend, Heinrich von Treitschke.

II. FRIENDSHIP WITH TREITSCHKE

Overbeck and Treitschke had been contemporaries ar the Kreuzschule, although Treitschke, three years the elder, graduated at the end of Overbeck's first year. They had no direct contact with each other at that time, but Overbeck recalled being in the audience at the 1851 commencement and hearing Treitschke declaim one of his own poems, a characteristic piece extolling the heroic, though futile, struggle of German peasants against the Danes for freedom in Schleswig-Holstein.[1] The two men were first introduced six years later in Dresden by Wolfgang Helbig, Overbeck's closest friend from the Gymnasium and a Burschenschaft comrade who had met Treitschke at Göttingen. By the time Overbeck returned from Berlin in 1861, he was part of the informal group around Treitschke, a small company which was accustomed to meet at Kitzing and Helbing's Tavern and which included the theologian Richard Lipsius, who would later, and not unexpectedly, write an extremely laudatory review of Overbeck's dissertation on Hippolytus;[2] the philologist Alfred Gutschmid;

---

[1] Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), p. 161. Andreas Dorpalen, Heinrich von Treitschke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 10-11. The last stanza of Treitschke's poem ran:

> We shall be ready always, when fate shall call us forth,
> To wipe out shame and insult with an avenging sword.
> Well may the waves keep raging, and our ships may roll,
> We'll win the final battle, we shall reach our goal.

[2] Literarisches Centralblatt fur Deutschland, No. 50 (December 10, 1864), columns 1193-1195.

Hermann Brockhaus, Orientalist and husband of Richard Wagner's youngest sister, Ottilie; Treitschke's publisher, Salomon Hirzel; the journalist Moritz Busch, editor of Die Grenzboten; and ultimately Freytag.[3]

Overbeck was fascinated by the voluble Treitschke, who had rapidly become both popular and controversial by peppering his history courses with political asides and his delivery with profanity and conviction[4]-- the sort of lecturing, it might be noted, that Overbeck would later solidly condemn for, among other things, annihilating scholarship and pandering to transitory fashions. Overbeck was a member of the first audience to attend Treitschke's course on political theory, which was given in the spring of 1859. On Sundays and holidays they liked to go walking together or hiking in the Harz and talk politics; these conversations were necessarily loud since Treitschke was almost completely deaf, and generally subversive to an uncomfortable extent. For these reasons the discussions, when they were pursued in Leipzig over lunch, customarily attracted a sizeable share of listeners.

A basic element which permitted these two dissimilar temperaments to get along so well was in the "poison of criticism,"[5] and a secular frame of mind so obvious in a mutual concurrence of attitude toward religious affairs. At that time, Treitschke was a staunch

---

[3] Dorpalen, Treitschke, p. 72. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 4.

[4] Dorpalen, Treitschke, p. 49.

[5] Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), p. 162.

advocate of the iconoclasm of David Friedrich Strauss,[6] and he was delighted to find in Overbeck a theologian as radical as Strauss, if not more so. He wrote to Hugo Meyer,

> I associate with Overbeck a great deal because he is almost the only unmarried one among my acquaintances. I like him very much, but I fear a hard fight stands before him. With his healthy David Strauss-esque opinions, only the gods know how he will get on with the Leipzig Zion-cossacks. But I think he is man enough to show his teeth to the dogs.[7]

In 1866 he wrote to Emma von Bodman, his future wife:

> In all my life I have found among young theologians one individual whom I came to like. There is something malformed about a science which is plainly no science but a bastard of reason and belief. That one is my little friend Overbeck in Jena; he does not believe a thing, no more than David Strauss. That is a splendid man! Before I had not considered so much kindheartedness possible in an intelligent man of firm character.[8]

A good deal more surprising than accord on the concept that the Christian age was passing,[9] was the degree to which friendship with Treitschke had politicized Overbeck. In the letters Overbeck wrote to Treitschke from Jena international affairs and topics pertaining to German unification occupy an inordinate amount of space, particularly when Overbeck's background, with its emphasis on Bildung and self-development rather than on politics, is taken into consider-

---

[6] Of Strauss, Treitschke wrote: "There still are men who have the courage of their convictions." Letter to Overbeck, April 9, 1864. Heinrich von Treitschkes Briefe, edited by Max Cornicelius (Leipzig: G. Hirzel, 1914-1920), II, p. 321.

[7] March 29, 1862. Ibid., p. 210.

[8] August 9, 1866. Ibid., III, p. 42.

[9] For example, Overbeck to Treitschke, December 9, 1864. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 11.

ation. Certainly these matters had not proven of great interest to Overbeck before, and, once he had settled in Basel, removed from the center of activity, they would again recede into the background of his concerns. There can be no doubt that this innovation had been introduced beginning with Treitschke's political theory course in 1859. Treitschke had forcefully and incontrovertibly instructed Overbeck of the necessity and justice of a German united under Prussian leadership. Under the compelling power of this persuasion, Overbeck, the cosmopolitan, who could not even speak German intelligibly until he was thirteen, had become a patriot, advocating the unitary, kleindeutsch solution for the German question.

In a sense, perhaps, this aberration was logical. Treitschke certainly had no presupposition or contrary sympathies to overcome as far as Overbeck was concerned. Despite Bernoulli's assumptions to the contrary, there is no reason to believe that Overbeck's decade of political partisanship was, in fact, an indigenous development, with Treitschke performing no more than the role of a catalyst.[10] When Overbeck visualized the existence of a clear-cut political problem and asserted it had a single, unambiguous answer, when he demonstrated pristine confidence in the salubrious powers of Liberalism, he sounded very much like the Treitschke of the early 1860's. Certainly Overbeck's attitudes were not mere carbon copies, but they were so similar to Treitschke's that he must be considered their origin. Possibly Treitschke considered Overbeck a disciple;

---

[10] Ibid., I, p. 35.

Treitschke's solicitude toward the "little Dr. Overbeck" was like that shown to a somewhat inexperienced younger brother. Only with time and meditation did the complexities and dichotomies that Overbeck customarily perceived in all questions reassert themselves in his mind and cause him, gradually, to dissociate himself from the direction taken by both Treitschke's theorization and Germany.

Initially, he manifested the zeal of a neophyte in his assessments of developments during the Prussian constitutional crisis and the early years of Bismarck's ministry, acting as an echo and a commentator for his friend's concepts. In November, 1864, Treitschke asked for a judgment concerning the probable public reaction to the new first volume of his Historische und politische Aufsätze (Historical and Political Essays), a collection of treatises which, proceeding from the assumption of the primacy of the state before the individual, argued for the expulsion of Austria from German affairs and the establishment of a unitary German nation-state under the leadership of Prussia, alone qualified by virtue of discipline, history, power, and vigor to achieve such fulfillment.[11]

In his reply, Overbeck indicated his agreement with the theses of the book, adding:

> The concept of a unitary state for Germany belongs to the thoughts which certainly far more people entertain out of innermost conviction than it appears, and it needs only to be expressed with unequivocal frankness in order to gain adherents everywhere. . . . It is unquestionable in my eyes that we do not have in our monarchies elements dedicated to

---

[11] Letter of November 19, 1864. Treitschkes Briefe, II, pp. 352-354.

> the idea of a federation, which are necessary for its institution; [12] it is just as irrefutable that the federative state imposes greater sacrifice upon the races than the unitary. However, I think your book will have a far more difficult task . . . with the Prussian leadership. That this leadership and the unity of Germany stand in the relation of means to end so many people unfortunately prefer not to comprehend. Here, at last, particularism will always assert itself. If only in the form of a vague dreaminess. Whoever is somewhat open to argument and has an earnest patriotism must be converted by your work from the sad aberration for Austria or another unknown native land of the German Empire and let himself be won for Prussia, voting for her unconditionally, as you do. Certainly it is still heard frequently that people would submit to Prussia if she were only ruled liberally. However, this is a reversible argument since it is quite possible Prussia cannot overcome its reactionary elements without the rest of Germany.[13]

When, in February of the next year, Treitschke finally overcame the remaining doubts he possessed concerning the disposition of Schleswig-Holstein and openly declared himself in favor of outright annexation of the duchies by Prussia,[14] Overbeck immediately indicated his agreement with this position, although he added a qualification which not only betrayed a growing discomfort with the idea of war as a diplomatic weapon but also suggested he would ultimately not be willing to accept unification at any price. He wrote to Treitschke on February 20, 1865:

---

[12] One of Treitschke's arguments against federation was that monarchies, unlike republics, could not willingly subordinate dynastic rivalry to the whole entity.

[13] Letter of December 9, 1864. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 9-10.

[14] Dorpalen, Treitschke, p. 98.

> I concur absolutely with your statements, in so far as your supposition that annexation in the manner of accomplished fact is carried out peacefully (I mean without force against the inhabitants) proves correct, as I do not doubt it will . . . Force would, in all probability, only entail unspeakable confusion in German affairs.[15]

Nonetheless a few months later he reiterated his support as an "unconditional annexationist" for Treitschke's uncompromising stance and dismissed as "no less than shameful" the receptivity of many Liberals toward the claims of Duke Friedrich of Augustenberg, who would have the duchies established as independent members of the Confederation.[16] Accordingly, Overbeck expressed complete satisfaction with the expansion of the Prussian boundaries after the Austrian War in 1866; he considered the rights of the "kraut princes" forfeit.[17]

For all of this, one thing stuck in his throat: Bismarck. Without doubt, the same was the case with Treitschke, at least originally. Still, beginning with the Schleswig-Holstein crisis, Treitschke endorsed Bismarck's foreign policy because, despite its chicanery, it worked to the advantage of German unity. With this initial commitment, the erosion of his liberalism proceeded at a brisk pace until, by 1868, his essay on the "Constitutional Kingdom in Germany" formally renounced parliamentarianism for King, army and bureaucracy, the bulwarks against particularism. Treitschke's

---

[15] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 12.

[16] Letter to Treitschke, October 25, 1865. Ibid., p. 14.

[17] Letters to Treitschke, July 17 and September 8, 1866. Ibid., pp. 20-23.

prime loyalty was German unification, and he wholeheartedly championed those forces most capable of achieving and maintaining this goal.

Overbeck, on the other hand, lacked this sort of facile opportunism. His political consciousness had been nurtured in the days when Treitschke's liberalism was at high tide, and he could not discard these ideals which had initially excited him simply because they were now inconvenient. Overbeck could not identify morality with successful acts of state without qualms. At the outbreak of hostilities in 1866 he wrote to Treitschke of an ambivalence which was gnawing him: he agreed with the goal of Prussian politics, a united Germany, but he was extremely uncomfortable about the means chosen by Bismarck for realizing this goal. He was unable to escape the distinct apprehension that the possibility of this unified Germany being a liberal state was now perilously compromised, an attitude the passiveness of the German liberal politicians could only confirm.[18]

Bismarck's politics, he admitted at other times, were energetic and clever but also dangerous, the actions of an adventurer; Overbeck hoped that once Schleswig and Holstein were finally annexed, the Liberals would again find the strength to become an effective opposition.[19] Patently, the issue penetrated much more deeply than even misgivings about Bismarck's Realpolitik, both foreign and domes-

---

[18] June 18, 1866. Ibid., I, p. 17.

[19] Ibid., p. 18. Letters to Treitschke, February 20 and October 25, 1865.

tic. Overbeck wrote to Treitschke in his letter of June 18, 1866: "Only in one point I could not suppress the thought, I confess, whether in it [Treitschke's new pamphlet Der Krieg und die Bundesreform (War and Reform of the Confederation)] the magnitude of the misfortune that the questions of unity and freedom fall asunder as at present was entirely appreciated."[20] Liberals had always assumed the inseparability of the two concepts, but Overbeck recognized that such a maxim was by no means absolute. Circumstances might well force the establishment of priorities or compel an exclusive choice. In fact, this was the case after 1866.

In so far as Bernoulli's excerpted examples are an accurate gauge, after the splintering of the liberals into Bismarckian and Parliamentary wings in October, 1866, Overbeck's correspondence with Treitschke became markedly more involved with its author's career than with the further evolution of German unification. While expressing his essential agreement with his friend's justification of national unification by any means in the second volume of Treitschke's Historische und politische Aufsätze, Overbeck added that he was only a "cool monarchist" and "invincibly antipathetic toward war," which the essays found to be an agent of moral regeneration and companion to political ideals.[21]

Above all, Overbeck had hoped that a general European peace would proceed from the Peace of Prague, and when, four years later,

---

[20] Ibid., p. 18.

[21] Letter to Treitschke, March 8, 1870. Ibid., p. 29.

Napoleon's cabinet declared war on Prussia, he was extremely critical of "insane" French chauvinism but oddly detached in his comments concerning the final creation of a unified Germany. He wrote to Treitschke on the day after mobilization had begun:

> So, then, the unfortunate has broken out, the war which I above all have wished and always hoped the reflection of the two neighboring peoples would hold back until convinced of the possibility of peaceful dwelling side by side through the fact . . . In these few fateful days, we have already an immense success in that, as if by a stroke of magic, the unity of all Germany has come into life. If a few south German cabinets may have acted out of political sagacity or necessity, the voice of the people is unequivocal. Now, probably that delightful countryside which we recently roamed through together [22] will be visited next by the devastations of war.[23]

A few weeks later Treitschke replied: "We are on the best path, in fact and in truth, to become a people. You will have to learn to think somewhat more idealistically about war."[24]

Actually, questions of conscience aside, there were some extremely practical reasons behind the new welling up of concern within Overbeck about the direction of his own life. In 1867 he turned thirty years old, and this fact alone was forcing a set of re-evaluations upon him. To be certain, for all of the sarcastic jibes he exchanged with Treitschke about the pettiness of life in the smaller states of Germany, Overbeck considered hiw own existence in Jena in many respects idyllic and, until the end of his life, looked back on the whole experience as a "paradise." He enjoyed being

---

[22] Alsace.

[23] July 20, 1870. Ibid., pp. 31-32.

[24] Quoted in Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), p. 167.

around the dean of church historians, Karl von Hase, to whom he would dedicate his Zur Geschichte des Kanons in 1880. He liked belonging to a circle of young scholars known as "The Demigods," a group which included the zoologist Alfred Dohrn, the optician and physicist Ernst Abbe, and the Egyptologist Georg Ebers, the discoverer of the ancient Egyptian medical papyrus which bears his name. Overbeck was godfather to one of Ebers' daughters but always felt he could not become a close friend because Ebers had perverted his scholarship through periodic ventures into the writing of historical novels, a degrading sell-out to mass culture.

Even more than personal contacts, Overbeck valued the life of a free scholar which he could lead at Jena, relatively unencumbered by external pressures prescribing his own goals.[25] On the other hand, this free-wheeling pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, despite the other virtues it might have possessed, was not producing many tangible results. Overbeck was never able to attract more than a handful of students to his courses; in 1867 he lectured on the Epistle to the Romans before only one student, although this student was Gottfried Schönholzer, later deacon in Zurich.[26] Overbeck's most noteworthy academic achievement took place in the previous year when, in February, he gave one of the Wednesday "Rose Lectures" at the Univer-

---

[25] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 1-8; Nigg, Franz Overbeck, pp. 6-9; Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), pp. 142-143; and Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 5.

[26] Letter to Treitschke, June 18, 1867. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 25-26. Also, Overbeckiana: Übersicht über den Franz-Overbeck-Nachlass der Universitätsbibliothek Basel, Part I: Die Korrespondenz Franz Overbecks, edited by Ernst Staehelin (Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1962), p. 11.

sity, speaking on monasticism. This talk had a certain thematic value for the evolution of his mature thought concerning religion in that it was the earliest expression of the emphasis he would lay on asceticism as a basic characteristic of Christianity, evidence that this concept was original rather than the product of his contact with Nietzsche or Burckhardt in Basel.[27]

Outside of some fifty anonymous book reviews, he wrote almost nothing scholarly during these years: three pieces for the Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie and three articles for the Bibel-Lexikon of Daniel Schenkel, despite a certain antipathy for Schenkel's products in general.[28] Treitschke tried to convince him to compose some essays for the Preussische Jahrbücher, but Overbeck did not consider himself suitable for political treatises.[29] There was one book, published by his friend Hirzel and dedicated to Lipsius, a cumbersome reworking of the rationalist Wilhelm de Wette's Kurze Erklärung der Apostelgeschichte (A Brief Explanation of the Acts of the Apostles). This dissertation was intended to be something of a critical tour de force in that the original text was retained while Overbeck inserted his own Baur-esque commentary, usually negative, between dashes. The object was to respect de

---

[27] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 7.

[28] Letter to Treitschke, September 15, 1868. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 27. Overbeck's review of Schenkel's Das Charakterbild Jesu in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 2 (January 7, 1865), columns 33-35.

[29] Letter to Treitschke, July 17, 1866. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 21.

Wette's work while pointing up the possibilities of Baur's method. The result, which was printed about the same time Overbeck left Jena, was not very satisfactory.[30]

For all of the advantages attending complete freedom of inquiry there was the overwhelming drawback that Overbeck was not taking one step to advance beyond Privatdocent status and its insecurities; he seemed to be permanently frozen in the lowest berth of his profession. In 1867 the University of Giessen had inquired whether he wanted to be considered for an opening in the theology faculty, but because this professorship was tied to a pastorate and he no longer had the least intention of entering the ministry, he had to decline.[31] As he fully recognized, the extremity of his theological views -- he considered even the liberal theologians far too opportunistic and hypocritical in their devotion to scientific principles[32] -- made respectable employment anywhere within Germany extremely difficult, if not precluding it entirely. Therefore, the offer which he received from the University of Basel the day after his thirty-second birthday to appoint him associate professor in theology came both unexpectedly and providentially.

That such an invitation should have been extended to Overbeck was a mark of the extent to which the self-contained, conservative

---

[30] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 7.

[31] Letter to Treitschke, June 18, 1867. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 25. Letter to Friedrich Hermann Hesse, June 16, 1867, Overbeckiana, I, p. 85.

[32] See, for example, his letter to Treitschke, September 15, 1868. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 26-27.

city-state of Basel had fallen victim to religious revolution. Although the Basel church was certainly no citadel of blackest reaction, the Enlightenment had not been able to force upon it the sort of adjustments and concessions which the churches in other cantons had had to provide. During the second quarter of the nineteenth century, de Wette had taught at the university, enjoying considerable popularity among the students -- he had been persuasive enough to destroy the religious beliefs of Jakob Burckhardt, for example[33] -- but founding no real school of his own to further rationalistic Biblical criticism.

In the 1850's the siege of the established authorities by reformers began in earnest through journals and speeches. The liberals were, by and large, radical Hegelians who took their cues from Germany and attacked antediluvian dogma in the name of the immanence of God in the world, the humanity of Jesus and the ineluctability of progress. The reformers and their coordinating organ, the Verein für Kirchlich Reform (Union for Ecclesiastical Reform), possessed a good amount of public support for their efforts, and, amid the polemical bombardment of the positions of the two camps, a breach opened in the defense. The new university regulations of 1866 permitted the maintenance of five senior professors of theology. At that time there were only four: old Karl Rudolf Hagenbach, whose world was that of Herder and Schleiermacher; Hermann Schultz, professor of Old Testament; Georg Muller, who taught general religious history

---

[33] Erich Heller, The Disinherited Mind (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Company, 1961), pp. 69-70.

and New Testament; and the arch reactionary Christoph Johannes Riggenbach. Not one of these men was in harmony with the tendencies of the times, but the vacant fifth professorship opened the door to myriad possibilities.

In 1867 the Reformverein submitted a petition to the Small Council of the canton, the government, pointing out that unlike Bern and Zurich, Basel still lacked a professor of theology who was dedicated to free, scientific investigation, and calling on the authorities to correct this fault with dispatch. If, warned the petition, tje church failed to recognize the necessity of bringing religion into accord with modern scientific discoveries and continued to sacrifice what was reasonable to what was dogmatic, it ran the grave risk of losing all contact with the dominant attitudes of most of the populace. The Small Council eventually acknowledged the soundness of the Reformverein's argument and acceded to appoint a fifth professor with the desired characteristics.

The victory still had not fallen to the reform party, however, because such a man still had to be located. When Wilhelm Mangold of Marburg was contacted and declined to be a candidate for the position, there was no readily available alternative to consider.[34] In 1869

---

[34] For this Swiss background to Overbeck's appointment, see Edgar Bonjour, Die Universität Basel von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, 1460-1960 (Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1960), pp. 514-517. Also: D. Johannes Wendland, Hermann von der Goltz in Basel (1865-1873) und die kirchlich-theologischen Kämpfe seiner Zeit (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1933), especially pp. 24-37. Wendland managed to carry through his discussion of the religious turmoil of the late 1860's amd early 1870's without mentioning Overbeck. There is a good discussion of the wider ramifications of the liberal movement in Paul Burckhardt, Geschichte der Stadt Basel von der Zeit der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart (Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1942), pp. 276-292.

Ratsherr Wilhelm Vischer, president of the education Kollegium and the board of trustees contacted Lipsius for suggestions, and Lipsius proposed that Basel sound out Overbeck. To be certain, Overbeck was not the sort of theologian the reformers had in mind. They were looking for a militant pastor, ready to go to war against both pietism and orthodoxy, unafraid to test religious forms by the measure of natural science or impartial historical research. In the words of a liberal newspaper, the Schweizerischer Volksfreund, the demand was for a "pike among the carp not a fifth wheel on the wagon."[35] Overbeck was unknown, a radical, freethinking scholar, whose only interests lay in history rather than in speculative theology; he was manifestly no crusader.[36] Yet, this very promise of noninvolvement made it likely he would also be palatable to the conservatives; and he certainly never posed a real danger to them during his subsequent twenty-six years on the faculty.

So in November, 1869, Schultz contacted him concerning his interest in teaching at Basel and during the Christmas holidays Vischer arranged an interview.[37] Treitschke was elated at his friend's good fortune and urged him to accept the appointment without hesitation, commenting that Overbeck would not have to become a fixture in the bucolic landscape but could treat the whole affair as a trip of several year's duration. There was, after all, much to be

---

[35] Burckhardt, Geschichte der Stadt Basel, p. 293.

[36] Eduard His, Basler Gelehrte des 19. Jahrhunderts (Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1941), pp. 287-288.

[37] Overbeckiana, I, pp. 86-88.

learned from the Swiss. "You will find in Basel a magnificent land, in Jakob Burckhardt et al. excellent colleagues, and if you succeed in placing yourself well with Gelzer,[38] who is omnipotent among our Serenissimi, perhaps I still can greet you here sometime as colleague."[39]

Overbeck certainly had no knowledge of the lengthy machinations which lay behind the offer from Basel. In fact, he had little knowledge of conditions at Basel in general except that there was a mission house there.[40] He was quite cognizant of what was at stake, nevertheless. This chance to have a regular university appointment was likely to be the only one that would come. He wrote to Treitschke on December 1, 1869:

> With my theological radicalism, I am entirely agreeable to being transplanted among enemies. In these affairs I am theoretically for a sharp and ruthlessly clear opposition but practically for a good peace. The more difficult it is to hold these two things together, the happier I take part in the attempt. . . . In Germany at the moment circumstances are too bleakly without prospects for me; I cannot devote myself to waiting at any price. Finally, the ledger [his reworking of de Wette] won't help me much. On the contrary, the parsons within the Protestantenverein and outside of it are so prejudiced against me that presumably fairly all of

---

[38] Johann Heinrich Gelzer, historian, advocate of German unity and editor of Protestantischen Monatsblätter für innere Zeitgeschichte.

[39] Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), p. 167.

[40] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 7-11. Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 9.

> the German faculties will be hermetically sealed against me. Therefore I must consider the Basel invitation as completely unhoped for luck and as I will shortly write my acceptance, I truly leave myself the hope of returning to Germany some day.[41]

At Easter Overbeck arrived in Basel, charged with teaching ten or twelve hours of New Testament exegesis and early church history but released from any obligation to mount a pulpit or to provide the customary instruction at the associated Gymnasium.[42] A year later the Small Council named him a full professor. He was, needless to say, a complete disappointment to the Reformverein; he was, at once, too restrained and too critical. He followed the vagaries of the canton's religious and political upheavals with animated interest but declined participation. He declared in a letter to Treitschke in 1871:

> I myself am in the usual and fortunate situation of belonging to none of the three parties which make war on each other. The pietistic and mediatory [parties] make no claims on me. Now and then I have to fend off the reformers and am now probably passably at odds with them. Scientifically I am much more radical than these people; practically they take hold of the matter almost without suspicion of its weighty earnestness and prepare a religion of convenient phrases. I feel neither the strength nor the calling to bring a certain order into this, so I above all simply keep to my official activity.[43]

---

[41] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 28-29.

[42] Both Burckhardt and Nietzsche fulfilled this second requirement willingly. See: James Hastings Nichols' introduction to Jakob Burckhardt, Force and Freedom (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), pp. 13-14 and Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 66-68.

[43] December 21, 1871. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 83-84.

It should be marked, in passing, that the setback suffered by the reformers in the affair of the fifth chair in theology proved to be only temporary. By 1874 a new ecclesiastical regimen was in force, removing ultimate power in church affairs from the Great Council and investing it in an elected synod, composed of both pastors and laymen. With this achievement, liberal changes gushed forth in a flood tide, leading not only to the installation of progressive ministers and the veiled shattering of the Landeskirche into orthodox and liberal -- or "positive" -- segments, but a complete revision of the cantonal constitution, establishing for the Liberals the same sort of ascendancy in Basel which they acquired in the rest of western Europe during this period.[44]

When Overbeck arrived in Basel, he moved into quarters secured for him by Schultz's wife on the ground floor of Schützengraben 45, where Friedrich Nietzsche, professor of classical philology, was already living one flight above.[45] These two neighbors struck it off well at once, although Nietzsche was seven years younger than Overbeck. Both were nominally Saxons, and both had studied at Leipzig. In consideration of this common heritage, when the proprietorship of their rooming house shifted from the widow Vogler to a couple named Baumann, they privately renamed the estab-

---

[44] Wendland, Hermann von der Goltz, pp. 37, 57-58. Burckhardt, Geschichte der Stadt Basel, pp. 293-299, 310-316.

[45] Overbeckiana, I, p. 87, footnote 1. Crane Brinton, Nietzsche (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), p. 32.

lishment "Baumann's Hole" in honor of a geographic point in the Harz. By the winter of 1870 they were accustomed to ear dinner together in Overbeck's apartment, which was the larger of the two, and to discuss the progress of the French war, a subject of more than speculative concern to both since Nietzsche had briefly participated in the conflict as a medical orderly and Overbeck experienced vicarious participation through his contact with Treitschke and the Kitzing circle. As the number of topics deliberated increased, a wide community of common interest was revealed. Overbeck found in Nietzsche's argument a sophisticated articulation of the same suspicion he himself was harboring concerning the evolution of European society and government, particularly the threat to what Nietzsche termed its "aesthetic values."[46]

A detailed consideration of the nature of this relationship between Overbeck and Nietzsche and its subsequent history will be supplied below; at this juncture, however, the point under investigation is its significance with respect to Overbeck's friendship with Treitschke. As Overbeck grew closer to Nietzsche, he grew more distant from Treitschke. There is a distinct danger in ascribing to Nietzsche the role of perpetrator of the gulf that opened between the two old friends since this interpretation quite easily lends itself to the caricature of Nietzsche as a sort of pagan Jesuit, engaged in a war for Overbeck's soul. Treitschke advanced this construction

---

[46] His, Basler Gelehrte, p. 288. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 59. Nigg, Franz Overbeck, pp. 16-17.

of events as the only plausible one. In 1874 he wrote to the Heidelberg theologian Wilhelm Gass:

> My dear Basel friend comes unfortunately more and more under the unfortunate influence of Nietzsche. His paper concerning Christianity and slavery [47] I found first rate; however, I fear he spoils the result of his work through entirely unnecessary deficiencies. . . .It would be too said if this bright and fundamentally amiably modest man works himself forcibly into the raw arrogance of the Schopenhauerian. I have made pressing remonstrances to him but unfortunately I can write him only every six months while Nietzsche daily and hourly trafficks with him.[48]

Actually, as has been suggested, the parting of ways between Treitschke and Overbeck far antedated the latter's settlement in Basel and was under way at least as early as 1866. Nietzsche's service in this process was to act as a source of encouragement and crystallization for Overbeck's natural tendencies. Nietzsche helped to clarify Overbeck's sentiments, but he certainly did not implant them. Overbeck would have arrived at equivalent conclusions if left to his own resources, though their forms would have been undoubtedly somewhat different and scarcely as distinct.

It is not adequate to suppose, as Bernoulli has done, that Nietzsche assumed the place of Treitschke in Overbeck's life, although this analysis seems to be the prevalent one.[49] As Overbeck

---

[47] One of three essays in Overbeck's Studien zur Geschichte der alten Kirche (Schloss-Chemnitz: Ernst Schmeitzner, 1875).

[48] November 24, 1874. Treitschkes Briefe, III, p. 406, footnote 2. Also, Dorpalen, Treitschke, pp. 207-208.

[49] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 100. Two other examples of this depiction may be found in Nigg, Franz Overbeck, pp. 22-23 and Carl Jentsch, "Overbeck und Treitschke," Die Grenzboten, LXVII;34 (August 20, 1908), p. 374.

was always careful to point out, he never really broke with Treitschke at any point after 1870.[50] Their correspondence continued on an amicable plane until stopping two years before Treitschke's death, and Treitschke sent Overbeck a copy of every book he produced.

At the offset, in fact, Overbeck was not aware of having been placed in an either-or situation with his two friends as mutually exclusive alternatives. He conceived of himself as occupying the position of mediator, diplomatically bringing the two viewpoints into some sort of agreement and did not appear to comprehend readily the extent to which there was no common meeting ground. Already Nietzsche was embarked on the effort to discover a new basis of values beyond Christianity and had enlisted nationalism among the follies and hypocrisies of modern man, while Treitschke, for whom patriotism was the highest interest, had retreated into religion -- or, at least, a faith which worked as a bulwark for the self-realization of the state.[51]

There is no indication that Overbeck was ever able to engineer a face-to-face meeting between these protagonists, but he did his best to explain Nietzsche to Treitschke in the most favorable light possible. In June, 1871, he wrote to Treitschke:

> When you were here in the fall, Nietzsche, who as a voluntary male nurse had joined our troops, himself lay ill in Erlangen military hospital. You probably will have heard two and a half years ago of the Leipzig student who, as such, was invited here as associate professor of philology. This

---

[50] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 191-192.

[51] Dorpalen, Treitschke, pp. 206-207, 236. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 36-37.

> is Nietzsche, whom a friendly star has made my fellow-lodger. The daily association with him since the past winter is the first, since we both separated, which reminded me of the days shared in Leipzig. Above all, with my otherwise fair isolation here, he became more and more valuable to me during the war. Since Nietzsche is German -- out of the Saxon province -- we have experienced this central issue together. To be sure, we were often enough in out talks far from the powerful events of the moment. Nietzsche is the first philologist I have met with whom one can speak as a nonphilologist about antiquity . . . He is in general certainly an entirely uncommonly gifted man and just as amiable as intelligent.[52]

That spring Overbeck sent him the first version of Nietzsche's essay Die Geburt der Tragödie (The Birth of Tragedy) for publication in the Preussische Jahrbücher. Treitschke's rejection of the contribution was adroit and tactful.

> I thank him [Nietzsche] for his beautiful gift. He belongs, as one realizes at the first glance, to the temperaments who have a right to go their own way, and I, as a layman, cannot pass sentence. Only I think such new, independent opinions as he makes them require a broader statement in order to be understood. For me, much, especially in the first half, was not entirely intelligible, and the majority of the Jahrbücher readers understand far less about Greek tragedy than I do.[53]

The inevitable moment of final reckoning was artificially postponed for two more years, largely because of Treitschke's forbearance and his desire to maintain relations with Overbeck on the old basis. Finally, in the course of 1873, it became inescapably obvious even for Overbeck that the advocate and the critic would never be able to contemplate the world through equivalent pairs of spectacles. They had nothing to discuss with each other and did not

---

[52] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 82-83.

[53] Letter to Overbeck, August 4, 1871. Treitschkes Briefe, III, p. 331.

speak the same language. The occasion which brought all of this to a head was the publication of the first of Nietzsche's Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen and the second of his books, David Strauss, der Bekenner und Schriftsteller (David Strauss, the Confessor and Writer). Overbeck sent a copy of this book along with his own treatise, Christlichkeit, to Treitschke in August for perusal, hoping for a suitably appreciative reaction and indicating his own solidarity with the unrelenting condemnation of German "pseudoculture" which Nietzsche's polemic handed down.[54]

Since Treitschke's sole reaction to these literary products was a discreet reticence, Overbeck impatiently pressed for an evaluation two months later, suggesting that the lack of candor Treitschke had chosen to display up to then on the subject was becoming a matter of some disappointment and perplexity. After all, he said, Treitschke certainly did not share the hostile sentiments toward Nietzsche expressed recently in a "stupid" and "perfidious" article published in Busch's Grenzboten:

> One would have to be truly an insensitive beast in order not to perceive in a book such as Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen the deepest, most serious, most original interest in the German nature and German greatness and, on the contrary, to hear in it scorn for these things.[55]

In Treitschke's reply to this prodding, composed three days later, came the decisive revelation of the extent to which a parting

---

[54] Letter to Treitschke, September 1, 1873. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 85-87.

[55] Letter to Treitschke, October 25, 1873. Ibid., pp. 87-88.

of the ways had taken place since the halcyon days in Leipzig. For all of his protestations of avuncular understanding of the forces currently working on his young ward's mind, for all of his insistence that his own attitude toward theology and organized religion remained as before, it was impossible to miss the point that he was not what he had been. His judgment on Christlichkeit was that its observations were often hard and sometimes unjust. Certainly he would not deny the incontrovertible fact that faith and reason existed as antagonistic forces, but neither would he condemn theologians for attempting to create harmony. The desire for comprehensive integration of all facets of life, after all, was a natural human tendency. Even more, he considered Overbeck's conception of Christianity far too restrictive and absolute. The true greatness of this religion, he now believed, lay precisely in its chameleonic adaptibility to political and cultural realities -- an observation which denied the foundations of his friend's investigations.

And how much more sunk in error was Nietzsche in whom Treitschke discerned a "noble, fundamentally German" spirit who had been so corrupted by the devil of "evil, envious, petty" Schopenhauer that he could find nothing but corruption and fraud on all sides! Nietzsche had essayed the role of prosecutor, but from the "sulking corners" of Basel nothing positive and little coherent had emerged, only "unfruitful and reprobate pessimism."

> Believe me, dear friend, our nation is richer in spiritual powers than you think. You sit there in your corner and see nothing, absolutely nothing, of that which stirs the nation outside of scanty and naturally trivial newspaper reportsm and you still presume to clamor about your people! . . . Certainly the danger which threatens us is American materialism which becomes threatening in all peoples with preponderant middle classes. In the battle against this deadly enemy of the German entity you will always find me an ally. But one does not combat it through false exaggerations. And one such exaggeration is the wild zeal against the decay of German science. The German political science of today is the first in the world -- of this I understand more than you -- no other people possess such an elevated, free, such a human state ideal. Concerning natural science, I was a guest of my friend Helmholz in Berlin just three days ago and have not received the impression of going to the dogs. And if it is otherwise in other branches of art and science, still it is no worse than in England, where Mill and Bright supply the tone, than in France, which once, indeed, had a national style but no longer has it today. No, dear friend, let us cooperate in the work of German science and everyone work therein on his share so that the intruding philistinism does not flood us entirely. We do not lack helpers: as soon as the sins of excessive speculation revealed themselves in Germany (and they were harmless in comparison to Anglo-French jobberies) there was an immediate opposition of public righteousness; and scarcely have we indulged for a while in the barbarism of "realist" education that Prussian schoolmen are gathering in Berlin and declare classical education as indispensable! A healthy national life contains so many salutary forces. . . . Your friend has such a beautiful talent: may he eventually learn to employ it in service of his people instead of destroying it in fruitless solitude.[56]

For Treitschke, the sole outstanding problem in Germany had been unification. All other values were secondary to this, and once it had been achieved, he assumed any remaining questions would be resolved as a matter of course. His position had never been fundamentally different. Overbeck had been mistaken if he assumed the

---

[56] Letter to Overbeck, October 28, 1873. Treitschkes Briefe, III, pp. 374-379.

proposition to be more complicated, if he believed that Treitschke agreed there were certain conditions under which unification would not be an acceptable solution and certain considerations which took precedence over the political. What Treitschke was now calling for was idealism, confidence in the state, and a positive attitude toward the future.

The insufficiency of this response was profoundly disheartening to Overbeck. He had anticipated general misunderstanding and rejection of the essays in general, but from Treitschke he had expected a reaction which displayed more sympathy and less invective. He wrote to Treitschke:

> That you cannot be pleased where I am, that is what I cannot bear as your friend. Indeed, I expected as I wrote you that you could take all sorts of offense but that you were so entirely unable to make friends with Nietzsche's book that is to me, openly stated, a painful surprise. I do not know of any other way to explain it to myself than that you, first of all, are not able to find yourself in the train of thought in which you may have gone down further and further especially in recent years and, at the same time, that you are exclusively in an environment which is alien to you. It is generally a misfortune in our German history that our political and our cultural movements have gone asunder so repeatedly and have ground to powder their strengths in unfortunate dichotomy. No man can be more convinced that Nietzsche that here only union can beat us Germans out to salvation.[57]

The grave miscalculation which Treitschke made was in not realizing that for whatever benefits the war might have bestowed on German political life, it had only a depressive effect on German culture. This was a truth that every babbit sensed, regardless of

---

[57] November 14, 1873. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 94-95.

how obscurely; "even Freytag, the archetype of what I call an apologist for optimism."[58]

The prime example of Treitschke's myopia, Overbeck came to feel, the final proof of how complacent he had become about the fate of culture and how willing to subordinate it to mere political expediency, was his post-1871 relationship with Christianity. Overbeck did not anathematize sincere Christianity, which was its own end, but Treitschke's faith was no more than a handmaiden to his political beliefs. Overbeck's attitude on this subject was quite evident in a letter which he penned to Treitschke in 1880 and which took issue with the latter's Ein Wort über unser Judentum (A Word Concerning our Jews) -- not, it might be observed, because he considered the tract unequivocally antisemitic but because it poured oil on the fire of a dispute which only demonstrated the "poverty of ideas" current in Germany. Rather, he objected to the "Christian tone" which was creeping into all of Treitschke's writings:

> I do not mean a personal feeling which I respect in the highest degree in everyone who possesses it . . . I mean the public use of which you make of this feeling in political strife and in which I see your old reserve, always particularly esteemed by me, vanish to drag religious questions into political conflict . . . I have in my life had occasion to keep at a distance all intermingling of radical ecclesiastical tendencies with political, and have done so certainly not because I had great liking for conservative intermixing of the same sort.[59]

---

[58] Ibid., p. 93

[59] December 19, 1880. Ibid., pp. 364-367.

There is much about this fading of the Overbeck-Treitschke relationship which smacks of the rupture between Nietzsche and Wagner that took place between 1873 and 1876[60] but none of the rancor. Treitschke condemned Nietzsche and never Overbeck himself.[61] Overbeck always insisted to his old friend:

> With you I have shared unforgettable years as with no other man. You have been my first true friend. You have, as the older, more experienced, so much more boldly restrained, first given to me some confidence in myself, and to you I will always owe a part of all that I am, think and do.[62]

Long after Treitschke's death Overbeck's judgment remained unaltered:

> Treitschke, I certainly must say, led me into life -- I have never forgotten that. However, in a certain sense he never was my leader in life and in no case could he have remained such. If, nevertheless, I have never ceased deploring that we finally separated as it happened and particularly as testified by his letters to me, I have also never stopped being glad that it never came to a violent break between us.[63]

---

[60] Nietzsche wrote: "By the summer of 1876, during the time of the first Festspiele, I said farewell to Wagner. I suffer no ambiguity; and since Wagner had moved to Germany, he had condescended step by step to everything I despise -- even to antisemitism. It was indeed high time to say farewell: soon after, I received the proof. Richard Wagner, apparently most triumphant, but in truth a decaying and despairing decadent, suddenly sank down, helpless and broken, before the Christian cross." Nietzsche contra Wagner in Werke in drei Bänden (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1955), II, p. 1054.

[61] For example, in a letter written to Overbeck on September 11, 1881, Treitschke commented: "Your misfortune is this queer Nietzsche who knows so much with his thoughts out of season and still is gnawed to the marrow by the most seasonable of all vices, megalomania. Your amiable and modest nature, which, by the way, I consider ten times more productive than Nietzsche's, does not suit you at all when you rashly and disdainfully criticize everything in your people." Treitschkes Briefe, III, pp. 534-535.

[62] November 14, 1873. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 88-89.

[63] Quoted in Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), p. 163.

The more unrelenting of Treitschke's partisans have supposed this statement was tantamount to a confession that without Treitschke to show the way into a critical attitude toward religion, Overbeck would have ended up a latter day Enlightenment parson, spending his life instructing the peasants of his parish in the modern techniques of cabbage raising.[64] This assertion is pure nonsense. That possibility had ceased to exist before Overbeck met Treitschke. What emerged from the years spent in association with Treitschke was a good deal more subtle: a deepening of Overbeck's capacities for adroitly employing the scalpel of criticism on the past and present and a general strengthening of his intellectual side. It is conceivable that Treitschke's influence may also be present in some of the writings Overbeck produced at Basel, where polemicism threatened to overpower dedication to impartial truth-seeking.[65]

Even more, Treitschke had made him aware of new areas of human activity and, by doing so, had assisted him in developing methods to approach them. Treitschke had posed the question of political awareness to Overbeck. Just as his contact with theologians while in school had, negatively, forced Overbeck to determine his own relation to theology and Christianity, so his contact with Treitschke had, perhaps more positively, led him to establish his relation to politics and the Reich. The conclusion was that he lacked both political and religious passions; his skepticism remained paramount.

---

[64] Cf., Jensch, Die Grenzboten, LXVII;34, pp. 369-370.

[65] Hans Schindler, Barth und Overbeck - Ein Betrag zur Genesis der dialektischen Theologie im Lichte der gegenwärtigen theologischen Situation (Gotha: Leopold Klotz, 1936), pp. 16-17.

III. FRIENDSHIP WITH NIETZSCHE

Overbeck's friendship with Nietzsche was an intensely private affair for him, candid and deep, something he "experienced" rather than "understood."[1] When he later wrote about it, he did so in this fashion rather than in the throes of "some sort of posthumous rapture" which would have only degraded the memory of the relationship.

> I was, when I got to know Nietzsche, 33 years old, 7 years older than he. That scarcely lets the realization of a friendship between us be expected; because of the circumstances of age his friendships with Gersdorff and Rohde were of an entirely different sort. Nevertheless, it occurred. Much that joined us together lay in the conditions under which we first met in the year 1870. Thus very soon, above that which separated us, we conceived a mutual confidence that secured us against all that the future caused us to experience at each other's hands. . . . My friendship with Nietzsche drew the greatest benefit out of its secrecy, without my complicity and to a degree of itself. I was with Nietzsche from the first his sincere and passionate friend, as far as I am concerned his admirer, but, to be certain, never his master. . . . We were two scholarly natures who wanted to rise above themselves: this is the only way I am able to explain our intimate friendship in view of such an enormous inequality in our talents -- whereby I have entirely no illusion concerning my inferiority -- as well as the great difference in our temperaments . . . Nietzsche is the man in whose presence I breathed the freest. . . .[2]

---

[1] Franz Overbeck, "Erinnerungen an Friedrich Nietzsche," Die neue Rundschau, (1906), p. 211.

[2] Ibid., pp. 320, 324-325, 329-330.

Overbeck maintained the totally personal character of his friendship, insisting he was under no obligation to support or correct public opinion concerning Nietzsche and remaining largely indifferent to the attitudes expressed by "the masses." As a result, it is difficult to present an adequate discussion of the complexities of the relationship. The correspondence between the two friends, a sizeable collection covering nineteen years and more than three hundred postcards and letters, does provide testimony to the sublimity of feeling, reciprocity and frankness which Overbeck wrote about a decade after Nietzsche's breakdown.

In this communication there was, of couse, the sort of mutual examination of historical and philosophical points that could be expected from two thinkers of their nature, particularly the religious problems which came to dominate Nietzsche's books. These interchanges tended to be speculative rather than scholarly, light more than ponderous. They lacked totally the didacticism from either direction that was so evident in the Treitschke-Overbeck correspondence. Overbeck and Nietzsche knew each other's minds well enough that argumentation over basic concepts was not necessary; it is perhaps surprising how little space was devoted to critical analysis of their ideas.

Their letters deal more with the sharing of experiences and impressions and discussions of the activities of common friends. These capsule descriptions possess a spontaneity possible only between two men who are completely themselves when together; they might be exemplified by a card written by Nietzsche in 1881 giving his

reaction to his discovery of Spinoza:

> I am utterly astonished, utterly exhausted! I have a precursor and what a one! I hardly knew Spinoza: that I desired him now was an 'act of instinct.' Not only is his overall tendency exactly like mine -- making knowledge the most powerful effect -- in five main points of his teaching I find myself again; this most unusual and singular thinker is closest to me in precisely these things: he denies free will, purpose, the moral world order, the unegoistic, evil. If, admittedly, the dissimilarities are enormous, these lie more in the differences of time, culture, science. In summa: my loneliness, which, as on high mountains, often made it difficult for me to breathe and caused my blood to rush out, is at least now a twosomeness. Strange![3]

Overbeck's role was always the more reserved but he did what he could to provide encouragement and comfort to Nietzsche in periods of depression or illness, remaining mindful of how ill-equipped one man is to be of spiritual assistance to another.[4] Nietzsche wrote to his friend Erwin Rohde:

> Overbeck is the most earnest, most candid, and personally most amiable man and scholar whom one could wish for a friend, precisely of that radicalism without which I am now entirely unable to associate with someone.[5]

For his part, Overbeck openly admitted Nietzsche's intellectual superiority and openly admired his friend's independence, critical acumen, mental agility and the skepticism which provided depth in his drive for truth. He remained objective and partially detached nevertheless, quite cognizant of Nietzsche's weaknesses. Overbeck reported:

---

[3] July 30, 1881. Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit Overbeck, pp. 149-150.

[4] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 18.

[5] March 22, 1873. Friedrich Nietzsches Gesammelte Briefe, II: Friedrich Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit E. Rohde, edited by Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche and Fritz Scholl (Leipzig: Insel, 1903), pp. 401-402.

> [Nietzsche] was a great man in no real sense. No one of his talents, as richly endowed as he was, secured greatness for him in itself. For it was the most unusual of these talents, the gift of soul analysis, which became so dangerous to him since he principally exercised it on himself and thereby destroyed his soul long before he died. Even strength of will was not developed in him to the excessive dimension which is the fundamental prerequisite of human greatness. . . . However, what really controlled and possessed him was the striving for greatness, the ambition in the contest of life (wherein he was so different from me and so differentiated from me) and with this striving as stimulation in itself he, in fact, developed his will to a force which at any rate raised him above the human average.[6]

Nietzsche claimed that his strongest characteristic was that of self-overcoming.[7] In fact, demurred Overbeck, Nietzsche manifested this trait in no great degree:

> As far as his genius was concerned in the highest sense, Nietzsche did not believe in it or, briefly stated, in himself. In my intimate intercourse with him as a friend I have heard impressive confessions about that -- at least in the years before he presented to the public the highest claims he made on himself -- so that for me the later external extravagances of his self-awareness would be taken to heart as no more than signs of this doubt rather than as signs of self-announcing insanity, as they generally are interpreted since the public is in the condition in general of looking back and forth at him from this end.[8]

The difficulty with Nietzsche, in Overbeck's view, was that the major element supporting his genius was his ability as a psychologist, but he was too prone to turn his gift upon himself with

---

[6] Overbeck, Die neue Rundschau (1906), pp. 209-210.

[7] Quoted in Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1965), p. 55.

[8] Overbeck, Die neue Rundschau (1906), p. 213.

lethal effects. There was nothing to moderate the violence of his self-probing and self-criticism. He lacked the counterbalancing refinement of an artistic temperament and, at best, could rise to the level of a rhetorician. Under these conditions, that he should eventually progress to madness was no particular surprise to Overbeck, at least in retrospect. Nietzsche's fate was a splendid demonstration of the logical, ultimate act of iconoclasm.[9]

Overbeck's judgments on Nietzsche's character, however, still leave open his attitude toward Nietzsche's philosophy. The proposition which requires attention with respect to this point is the one which has generally been of overriding concern to those who have dealt with this friendship: the extent to which Overbeck and Nietzsche exerted influence on the direction of each other's thought. The assumption of some sort of interconnection is all but inescapable not only because of the circumstantial evidence of five years of daily contact but also because of the thematic innovations evidenced in their published works after 1872. This transfiguration in tone and emphasis was, of course, much more startling in Overbeck, whose previous scholarly themes had held little foreshadowing of the polemical force of Christlichkeit, than in Nietzsche, whose Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen represented a temporary subordination of his interest in values to social criticism.

In view of the fact that Overbeck's metamorphosis appeared the more sudden and inexplicable, orthodox Nietzscheans and theologians like

---

[9] Ibid., p. 214.

Troeltsch and Eberhard Vischer, who had no use for the theories of either member of the pair, have assumed that Nietzsche, more bold and dynamic than his older friend, set the pace and created the viewpoints, which Overbeck subsequently absorbed. One member of this party even asserted that without the master's constant leadership and powerful concepts, Overbeck would have finally bridged the chasm between theology and Christianity, weakly returning to the fold of the believers.[10]

In the introduction to the second edition of Christlichkeit Overbeck gave full credit to the great consequence for his life of his friendship with Nietzsche and admitted that the book had had this influence incorporated into it.[11] Yet, he was certainly not conscious of having become Nietzsche's disciple after his arrival at Basel:

> I do not intend to assert here that at that time I learned wisdom from Nietzsche and that we became in this sense only 'one heart and one soul,' 'learned wisdom' from a man who at that time, as so many know today, had already long before conceived his great voyage of discovery beyond himself, within the broad horizons which had been laid before his view so early. To be sure, just as little do I intend to say that I, seven years older, was deflected entirely out of my own course in order to follow him blindly on his journey.[12]

The most significant portions of Nietzsche's writings to Overbeck were those motivated by the spirit of denial. There Nietzsche acted as a physician to his age, cutting away the dead and corrupted

---

[10] Martin Havenstein, "Franz Overbeck: Ein tragisches Theologenschicksal," Die Tat, III, Heft 8 (November, 1911), pp. 395-396.

[11] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, p. 13.

[12] Ibid., p. 15.

tissue in order to expose the diseases of society. When in the 1860's Nietzsche turned from being a scientist to being a seer Overbeck could not in good conscience follow him. The mysticism of Zarathustra and Übermensch -- in other words the dual vision which formed the climax of Nietzsche's philosophy -- were monstrous to Overbeck, products of desperation, of an inability to find a center, of an inexorable drive to extremism. These absurd fragments of self-deception, chimeras of idealism, left Nietzsche wide open to attack.[13]

Nietzsche's ultimate failure was not a sufficient argument against his original intentions as far as Overbeck was concerned. Nietzsche had, after all, correctly analyzed the prevailing currents of modern times and had done so in a rational fashion. His error was in eventually surrendering to despair and going on to attempt to discover the absolutes which are unknowable to the human mind. It was this act of misfortune which had doomed him long before the disintegration of his mind. Nietzsche's debacle was actually no worse than that suffered by any other philosopher, only more spectacular. Overbeck wrote: "What forsook him was luck, which has been favorable to more fortunate people I know. . . . who have at least been able to keep their craft upright during their aimless journey."[14] Since he must be classified as an interesting spectator of Nietzsche's voyage into the unknown but hardly a co-participant and since the qualities he admired most in Nietzsche were comparable

---

[13] Overbeck, Die neue Rundschau (1906), pp. 216-219, 330.

[14] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 135-136.

to those he had been cultivating in himself since the Leipzig days, Overbeck could hardly be termed a convert to Nietzscheanism.

Bernoulli has been the most prominent spokesman for the opposite assumption, insisting that Overbeck could not have appropriated the antiChristian position of Nietzsche, because, in the early 1870's, the latter had none. Rather, it was Overbeck who was the mentor, leading Nietzsche beyond Greek culture and aesthetics to investigate the foundations of Christianity itself. Bernoulli designated Nietzsche's essay on Strauss an elaboration upon themes first devised by Overbeck and found Overbeck the model for various of the observations concerning historians and scholars which appeared in Nietzsche's subsequent books, especially the critical historian described in Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben (On the Use and Abuse of History for Life).[15] Overbeck's other biographer, Nigg, broadly agreed that with respect to religious matters at any rate Nietzsche received both stimulation and instruction

---

[15] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 128-131. Of the critical historian Nietzsche observed in part: "Man must have the strength to break up the past, and apply it, too, in order to live. He must bring the past to the bar of judgment, interrogate it remorselessly, and finally condemn it . . . The same life that needs forgetfulness sometimes needs its destruction; for should the injustice of something ever become obvious -- a monopoly, a caste, a dynasty, for example -- the thing deserves to fall. Its past is critically examined, the knife put to its roots, and all the 'pieties' are grimly trodden under foot. The process is always dangerous, even for life; and the men or the times that serve life in this way, by judging and annihilating the past, are always dangerous to themselves and others." (Werke, I, p. 229.) Karl Joël also fel that Overbeck was the prototype for this description. Die neue Rundschau (1905), p. 1146.

from his neighbor rather than providing them. As Nigg admitted, there is extreme difficulty in demonstrating materially the truth of this theory.[16]

The Overbeck-Nietzsche correspondence, where such tutelage might reasonably be expected to display itself, indicates only that in order to support his intuitions, Nietzsche sometimes applied to his friend for bibliographical suggestions or for the source of a particular quotation -- once even to locate a passage from one of his own books.[17] Beyond examples of this sort there is no perceptible flow of information or ideas from Overbeck to Nietzsche in the letters; the sole legitimate conclusion must be that Nietzsche recognized Overbeck as the superior scholar, which was, without question, the case. As Walter Kaufmann has stated, it is rash to assume the derivation of Nietzsche's religious views from Overbeck.[18]

Overbeck presumed that Nietzsche shared his own agnosticism, but the little he wrote on the subject never went beyond the postulate that this attitude naturally must exist in any skeptic. He noted:

> Nietzsche said God is dead and that is different from saying that there is no God -- that is, that he cannot exist, does not, will not, and never did. On the contrary: God once existed! This is the only atheism within the power of man, the only one possible for him, the only form of atheism accessible to him. The other form is the superhuman, and

---

[16] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, pp. 43-44.

[17] Nietzsche's postcard to Overbeck, October 8, 1888. Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit Overbeck, pp. 436-437.

[18] Kaufmann, Nietzsche, pp. 36-37.

> Nietzsche's attitude toward this is uncertain, hanging together perfectly with the ambiguity of his concept of the Übermensch. In any case, Nietzsche never avowed this superhuman form. . . . I think only this: the existence of God, how conditions are with him, do not concern us men, and I believe Nietzsche's atheistic formula was concerned with that which I have just called in the power of man . . . I never had the impression from him that he said anything about God's existence, but I am also uncertain whether he himself ever intended to do so.[19]

For all of the various similarities between their analyses of Christianity, there remained a fundamental difference between a man who spent his life in repudiating Christian morality in the name of overcoming himself and a man who never felt this need. Perhaps, as Ernst Benz has proposed, this fact lay at the basis of Nietzsche's admiration for Overbeck, the living proof that the death of God could be accepted with composure as a state of inner freedom.[20]

Overbeck himself wrote that, to a degree, the relationship of teacher and pupil "unnaturally" played a part in his friendship with Nietzsche, although he never defined with any precision what he meant.[21] Certainly there is no reason to suppose, as Bernoulli did,[22] that Overbeck necessarily placed himself in the first category. Presumably he was referring to a sort of mutual interaction in which the two minds functioned independently but still reinforced one another. There are clues to how this process functioned in the simultaneous

---

[19] Overbeck, Die neue Rundschau (1906), pp. 222-223.

[20] Benz, Nietzsches Ideen, pp. 145, 149.

[21] Overbeck, Die neue Rundschau (1906), p. 321.

[22] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 128.

appearance of Christlichkeit and David Strauss, which was more than a chance occurrence since the authors explicitly considered their books interrelated and complementary. Nietzsche had provided impetus to Overbeck for thinking through his theological position in a comprehensive manner, and Nietzsche's example in committing his criticisms of society to print had given Overbeck the requisite boldness for pulling together his own conclusions in a literary form. Although Nietzsche's essay concerned the victory of the German Empire over the German mind while Overbeck's remained largely centered on the character of modern theology, each took its departure from a contemporary theological work and attacked certain manifestations of cultural philistinism.[23] The subject matter had emerged from two years of daily conversation and was common property.

Overbeck secretly initiated his project during the Easter holidays of 1873 while Nietzsche was away at Bayreuth and when his friend returned to Basel, pleasantly surprised him with the news that the book would be completed by mid May. Salomon Hirzel did not want to handle the manuscript, claiming he had currently lost all taste for theological polemicism,[24] so Nietzsche packed it off to his own publisher, Ernst Wilhelm Fritsch, to whom he had just consigned the volume on Strauss. The books were printed at the same time, and Nietzsche celebrated the event with an exercise in versification, inscribed in a copy of David Strauss presented to Overbeck:

---

[23] A comparison of the content of the two books is offered below. See Chapter VII.

[24] Hirzel's letter to Overbeck, April 22, 1873. Overbeckiana, I, p. 100.

Ein Zwillingspaar aus einem Haus
ging muthig in die Welt hinaus,
Welt-Drachen to zerreissen.
Zwei-Vaterwerk! Ein Wunder war's!
Die Mutter doch des Zwillingspaars
Freundschaft ist sie geheissen![25]

Beneath these lines he appended a postscript: "The one the father of the other."[26]

It would be impossible, in brief, to trace particular ideas to individual sources; the interaction was at once too subtle and too complex to be easily reduced to such a scheme. In their feeling of being out of step with the spirit of their age, of being "out of season" and in their distaste for all the shapes of modern insanity, from antisemitism and nationalism to mindless optimism and cultural philistinism, they naturally drew together and reinforced, rather than taught, each other. Possibly Benz has cut through to the core of the matter:

> What united the passionate hater Nietzsche with the passionless, cool critic Overbeck is the common refusal of the traditional ecclesiastical picture of God, in which they joined together and confirmed each other, albeit from different experiences and concepts.[27]

In this reciprocity neither man was distinctly the leader.

---

[25] A pair of twins from one house/Go out courageously into the world/To tear apart the world-demons./The work of two fathers! It was a miracle!/The mother of the pair of twins/Is called friendship!

[26] Overbeck described the gestation and birth of his book in Christlichkeit, pp. 16-19.

[27] Benz, Nietzsches Ideen, p. 144.

Overbeck's friendship with Nietzsche naturally brought within his range all of the individuals with whom the young philologist was already associated by various threads. By and large, these other relationships were untroubled affairs, not possessing the intimate qualities of the companionship Overbeck found in Leipzig, and he wrote little about them. Until the onrush of his insanity, Nietzsche venerated aristocratic Jakob Burckhardt, whose love for antiquity and sense of tragic pessimism gratified him and whose impeccable serenity, he was convinced, acted as a mask for despair over the erosion of western civilization. Overbeck appreciated Burckhardt as a symbol of Basel's tolerance,[28] but he never shared in the closeness Nietzsche felt for the historian.

Despite a marked affinity between Overbeck and Burckhardt in perspective with regard to the ultimate nature of Christianity and the emptiness of its modern forms,[29] there appeared to be little communication between the two professors other than that afforded by their common interest in Nietzsche's well-being. In his reminiscences Overbeck even twitted the old man for adopting the theatricalism of "Goethean hocus-pocus" in his teaching methods [30] and for displaying a certain tendency toward pusillanimity in incomfortable situations, to the point where Burckhardt was not above playing the

---

[28] Overbeckiana, II, p. 126.

[29] There is a brief, pointed essay on Burckhardt's view of Christianity in Karl Löwith, Meaning in History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 20-32.

[30] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 184-185.

fool in order to extricate himself.[31] Overbeck experienced far greater cordiality with Erwin Rohde, Nietzsche's long time friend and classmate from Leipzig, and Heinrich Koselitz, who resided in Italy, composing music and writing under the pseudonym of Peter Gast.

Hostile contemporaries thought Rohde, who taught classical philology in universities ranging from Kiel to Heidelberg, cast in the same Schopenhauerian mold that had produced Overbeck and Nietzsche and sometimes spoke of them as a triumvirate, the Giftbude (venom-shack), the peculiar attribute of which was to denigrate whatever was occurring in Germany.[32] Actually Nietzsche's friendship with Rohde contained the same tragic leitmotif that all of his other friendships had, except the ones with Overbeck and the philosopher Paul Deussen:[33] a passionate attachment which various tensions

---

[31] Overbeck, Die neue Rundschau (1906), pp. 229-230. One of the several inanities petpetrated by Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche concerning Overbeck was that Burckhardt despised him to the point of refusing to enter her brother's house if Overbeck happened to be there. The Life of Nietzsche, translated by Anthony M. Ludovici and Paul V. Cohn, 2 volumes (New York: Sturgis and Walton, 1912-1915), II, p. 42.

[32] Writing to the Dorpat church historian, Moritz von Engelhardt, in January of 1875, Adolf von Harnack quoted the observations of Julius Kaftan, dogmatician and Privatdocent in Basel, that no member of the Giftbude could raise a pen without commencing to abuse something. Agnes von Zahn-Harnack, Adolf von Harnack (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1951), pp. 60-61. Occasionally, instead of Rohde, another of Nietzsche's Leipzig comrades, the philosopher Heinrich Romundt, was specified as the third member of the group. This configuration had the advantage of tidiness, since between 1872 and 1875 Romundt was a Privatdocent in Basel and lived for part of the time in "Baumann's Hole." In the end, he betrayed his friends by becoming a Catholic priest and returned to Germany to teach in various Gymnasien. Nietzsche to Rohde, February 28, 1875. Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit Rohde, pp. 493-494.

[33] Deussen wrote about his friendship in Erinnerungen an Friedrich Nietzsche (Leipzig: 1901).

eroded, metamorphosing into aversion. In contradistinction to Nietzsche's hermitic existence as an obscure prophet, Rohde easily fit himself into the academic establishment; made his name with a study of Greek religion, Psyche;[34] and eventually married and raised a son for whom Overbeck acted as godfather.[35]

Rohde always felt comfortable with Overbeck but grew estranged from Nietzsche as the latter appeared to be betraying their youthful romanticism during the passage of years. When Jenseits von Gut und Bose (Beyond Good and Evil) appeared in 1886 Rohde vehemently denounced the book to Overbeck for its arbitrary point of view, its naivete, its vanity, its "almost childish" argument.[36] With Nietzsche's mental collapse, Rohde suffered second thoughts about the treatment he had handed his old friend, and, as a measure of repentance, he permitted his name to be used in connection with the machinations of Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche's Nietzsche Archive. Rohde died two years before Nietzsche did, in 1898, still unsympathetic with his old friend's attempt at the revaluation of values.

---

[34] Freiburg: 1890.

[35] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 23.

[36] Letter from September 1, 1886. Overbeckiana, I, pp. 145-146. Three weeks later Overbeck replied in Nietzsche's defense, and an excerpt from this response is quoted in Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, II, pp. 164-165.

Overbeck supposed that the basis of the division between the two men lay less in conflict of two distinct attitudes toward the world than in Rohde's impatient temperament, which made continuing amity impossible, as the emphasis of their interests diverged. The quality Overbeck most admired in Rohde, his all-pervasive skepticism, made him a better scholar than Nietzsche, but it also made Nietzsche's speculative inquiry after the basis of an operable philosophy incomprehensible to him. The stability of his own friendship with Rohde Overbeck attributed to their common maturity at the time they met, a state which prevented the formation of illusions of "rapture" and permitted their minds to evolve in separate directions without the danger of explosion.[37]

The tripartite equality and independence so evident here did not exist in the case of Peter Gast. He was a born disciple. Attracted by Nietzsche's Geburt der Tragödie, he had left Saxony in 1875 to study at Basel, remained there three years, and never quite developed beyond the apprenticeship station he had adopted with regard to Nietzsche and Overbeck.[38] In 1881 Gast wrote effusively to Overbeck from Venice, where he performed clerical duties for Nietzsche from time to time:

> I often think with a sort of grateful sense about the dispensation of providence that I am allowed to live in the proximity of such intellectually efficacious men as you and Professor Nietzsche. Whatever has flowed into

---

[37] Overbeck, Die neue Rundschau (1906), pp. 321-324. There is an extant biography of Rohde by Otto Crusius, a professor of classical philosophy at Heidelberg and Munich, Erwin Rohde (Tübingen: 1902).

[38] Overbeckiana, I, p. 122, footnote 3.

> me from both of you, that belongs to the most decisive elements for the course of my life . . .[39]

In the 1890's Gast faithfully shifted his allegiance to the Nietzsche Archive, assisting Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche in her feud with Bernoulli and forcing, by court order, the inking over of selections from his correspondence which had been published in the second volume of Overbeck und Nietzsche.[40] Overbeck realized how galling it must have been for Nietzsche to have as his single apostle a man such as Gast, loyal to a fault and utterly incapable of advancing to independent thought. Overbeck pointed out:

> Only in this connection is the blind faith of Nietzsche in the extravagant worth of Peter Gast's music to be understood. This faith was an indispensable need for Nietzsche in order to save Peter Gast for himself as a man. Only with this did Peter Gast not sink to a mere (subhuman) typewriter. He had to find in Peter Gast something which he could believe possessed a human kernel, and this kernel was supposed to be only his music.[41]

The tragedy of this assumption, as Overbeck must have known from his reading of the pupil's scores, was that Gast demonstrated no more

---

[39] November 14, 1881. Overbeckiana, I, p. 133.

[40] Since the reasoned and objective depiction of her brother in Bernoulli's biography did not match her own concept of Nietzsche as a saint in disguise, Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche denounced the work as "devoid of any significance," adding "starting from a standpoint of utter ignorance, it constantly flies in the face of fact and indulges in the most shameless libels." Far from showing Overbeck to be Nietzsche's best friend, she concluded, the two Bernoulli volumes prove him an enemy. Life of Nietzsche, II, pp. vii - ix.

[41] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, II, pp. 118-119.

than mediocre ability as a composer.[42]

It would have been all but impossible in the early years of the decade of the seventies to associate with Nietzsche without, in addition, being connected with the circle around Richard Wagner. Overbeck had his Wagnerian phase, although since he never considered himself an unreserved devotee, he never had to suffer a tumultuous break with Bayreuth in Nietzschean fashion. In fact, when he had originally met Wagner during the winter of 1862-1863 at the Leipzig home of Hermann Brockhaus, Overbeck by no means sensed himself in the presence of a great man. He had been impressed by Wagner's energy, but, as he wrote to his parents at the time, he found "something pathetic" about the man's rhetoric.[43]

The man's music was another matter, particularly when Overbeck came in contact with Nietzsche's infectious enthusiasm. While, as he assured Treitschke, he certainly did not stray to the excesses of Geburt der Tragödie in judging Wagner's genius,[44] Overbeck's understanding and appreciation of the composer's goals advanced rapidly at

---

[42] There is a list of Overbeck's collection of Gast's compositions in Overbeckiana, II, pp. 151-152. A biography, Peter Gast, der Mensch, der Kunstler, der Gelehrte, was published by Friedrich Gotz in 1934.

[43] Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), p. 142.

[44] Letter to Treitschke, December 21, 1871. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 84.

Bayreuth.[45] In 1876 he took his bride there on their honeymoon for the three day performance of the Ring cycle and enrolled in the association of Bayreuth patrons.[46] All in all, the extent of the conversion had been astonishing. As a student he had ignominiously dismissed Wagner's Faust Overture as an "ear-splitting howl."[47]

The recognition was not one-sided. Wagner praised Overbeck's Christlichkeit and wrote Nietzsche at Christmas time, 1874: "By the way, Dr. [Karl] Fuchs gave me great pleasure by quoting a passage from Overbeck's book, which interested me so much that I am now rereading it."[48] There were, of course, certain qualifications of this endorsement: to Wagner the essay had provided a superior analysis of the condition of modern theology, but its conclusions were inadequate. Clearly, theology required resuscitation by means of a strong injection of Schopenhauer; Overbeck had missed the philosophic resolution to the dilemma he had uncovered.[49] Despite these reservations, Wagner

---

[45] Ibid., p. 102. See also Nietzsche to Overbeck, August, 1874, and Overbeck to Nietzsche, August 4, 1875, in Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit Overbeck, pp. 15-16, 37-39. Overbeck first visited Bayreuth during the Christmas vacation of 1873-1874 and returned the next summer as well as the following one.

[46] Overbeckiana, II, p. 121.

[47] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 62.

[48] The Nietzsche-Wagner Correspondence, edited by Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche, translated by Caroline V. Kerr (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1921), p. 236.

[49] Overbeckiana, I, p. 113, footnote 1.

liked Overbeck personally. When, in Menschliches, Allzumenschliches (Human, All-too-Human), Nietzsche publicly heralded his separation from his former "great benefactor," Wagner wrote two gracious letters to Overbeck, asking for news and lamenting the outbreak of "psychic convulsions" in his erstwhile protege.[50]

Characteristically, Overbeck maintained good relations with the Wagner family until his death,[51] although he developed grave misgivings of his own about the composer. At the time of Wagner's death Overbeck wrote to Rohde:

> I find these earlier works incomparably more illustrious, more full, and richer than the later ones, the second mode, in which Wagner is as if blinded by Schopenhauerian metaphysics and also in style, I feel, no longer finds the bright and enchanting rapture of the high points of these earlier works.[52]

Despite his expressed enjoyment of Tristan und Isolde and Die Meistersinger, Overbeck was not much of a musical revolutionary. He much preferred Brahms, the songs of Hugo Wolf, and the chamber music of Schubert, Schumann and Chopin that he once played on the piano with his sisters.[53]

Difference in aesthetic taste was not the crucial point in establishing Overbeck's attitude toward Wagner. What disturbed him was essentially the same thing that had horrified Nietzsche: not

---

[50] The texts appear in Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 263-264.

[51] For example, see the letter from Cosima Wagner to Overbeck on December 21, 1904, in Overbeckiana, I, pp. 216-217.

[52] March 18, 1883. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 383.

[53] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 30. Overbeckiana, II, p. 152. Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), pp. 151-156.

content with being a musical genius, Wagner had continually indulged in pseudointellectual exercises and founded a center for reichsdeutsch ranting. The prophet of Tribschen had transformed himself into the mountebank of Bayreuth. Legends to the contrary, the overwhelming objection that Nietzsche and Overbeck asserted to Parsifal was not that it was Christian but that its Christianity was sheer humbug.[54] Wagner's religion was about as self-reliant as Treitschke's.

Overbeck labelled Wagner "the theologian of his own art" and wrote of him:

> Scarcely any other judgment of Nietzsche transported the German cultural philistines more violently into indignation than the one concerning Luther and the Reformation -- Human, All-too-Human I, aphorism 237. They have this time an especially imposing chieftain who marches at their head: Richard Wagner. . . . One of the most revolting traits of Wagner as cultural apostle is his purposeful affectation of Germanism, the shrewd way how he understood to employ it occasionally for his purposes . . . When one saw Richard Wagner before himself, one repeatedly had the impression of a schoolmaster so strongly that it must be asked whether he had not become what he became only because he measured himself as the namesake of Wagner in Faust.[55]

In 1876, the year that Nietzsche attended the opening festival at Bayreuth and returned to Basel so physically sickened by the vulgarity of the event that the tenuous strands still binding him to Wagner dissolved completely, Overbeck, disregarding the admonition of Schopenhauer that men of intellect ought not to take wives, married Ida Rothpelz, a woman eleven years his junior. She was Swiss, from

---

[54] There is an admirable discussion of this point in Kaufmann, Nietzsche, pp. 37-46.

[55] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 104-106,

the region of Aarau, but had grown up in the Rhineland, thereby partially sharing her husband's mixed German and cosmopolitan heritage. She was educated, well read, and possessed the rationality which allowed her sympathy for Overbeck's work.[56] She did not, to be certain, merely rubber-stamp her husband's opinions. In Overbeck's writings there was no shadow of her own view that Nietzsche's philosophy was firmly within the religious tradition and even a surrogate for Christianity in which the Übermensch replaced God and eternal recurrence replaced resurrection. Although Overbeck was certain that Nietzsche had never read or been influenced by Max Stirner, Ida insisted that Nietzsche viewed Stirner as the boldest and most consequential thinker since Hobbes.[57] However, in all significant issues she was on his side, and above all she was no bluestocking. This Overbeck could not have tolerated. He unhesitatingly presumed the inequality of the sexes and that a healthy, happy mariiage must recognize this natural order of things; he firmly opposed feminism and the concept of women's rights as disruptive aberrations.[58] Ida clearly agreed, for the marriage, though childless, was tranquil and pleasant for both parties.

With the establishment of a new home life on Eulerstrasse, Overbeck found his intimacy with Nietzsche lessening as a matter of

---

[56] His, Basler Gelehrte, p. 289. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, II, p. 74.

[57] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 238-239,244-245, 428.

[58] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 283-286. Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 23.

course. Already they were pulling apart intellectually, as Overbeck would continue only to elaborate upon his statement of 1873 while Nietzsche was pursuing his speculations to what Overbeck viewed as dangerous extremes. Nevertheless, the friendship suffered no measurable damage. Ida, who had once met Nietzsche in 1870 and even then had been impressed by both his aura of mystery and the energetic artistry expressed in his hands,[59] got along well enough with him after her marriage. Nietzsche respected her intelligence and judgment. When he was in the throes of his affair with Lou Salomé, the young and gifted Russian woman in whom Nietzsche momentarily and mistakenly believed he had found a disciple, Ida served as something of a confidante for him.[60] Nietzsche was a frequent visitor to the Overbeck home and after he had resigned his professorship in 1879 because of his health and his desire to develop a philosophy outside of academic restrictions, he was their guest for periods of several weeks at a time. He was often ill during these visits, confined to bed and reduced to meals of strong broth and English tea, but when he was better he engaged in long, freewheeling discussions with Overbeck as of old. "Music and language," Ida wrote, "was his world."[61]

While Nietzsche spent the last decade of his sanity as a pain-

---

[59] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 234.

[60] Ibid., pp. 336-346.

[61] Ibid., pp. 236-237, 303.

wracked and increasingly uninhibited anchorite, dividing his time between Italy and Switzerland, Overbeck oversaw his financial affairs in Basel, managing his University pension and keeping records of his expenses. This faithfulness on the part of Overbeck in the minutiae of life, the immediate dispatch of objects or sums of money required, made it possible for Nietzsche to exist as a free spirit.[62] In 1888, while living in Turin, Nietzsche finally broke out of the paralyzing cycle of sickness and recuperation and plunged into an unprecedented orgy of work. In mid-November he wrote glowingly to Overbeck of the splendid reception afforded his new psychological study Der Fall Wagner (The Wagner Case); of the printing of Götzen-Dämmerung (Twilight of the Idols); of the preparation of his autobiography, Ecce Homo, for publication; and, finally, of the completion of the first section of his manifesto concerning the revaluation of values, Der Antichrist. Moreover, he was becoming famous partially through the efforts of Georg Brandes; August Strindberg and Bizet's widow were giving him public support. "With the best will, old friend Overbeck, I am unable to tell you something bad about myself. Work and good humour go on and on in a tempo fortissimo."[63]

On Christmas Day he finished Nietzsche contra Wagner and wrote to Overbeck: "Between ourselves, I shall come to Basel this spring -- I need to! It is the devil when one cannot say a word in confi-

---

[62] Ibid., pp. 295-296. Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit Overbeck. passim.

[63] November 13, 1888. Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit Overbeck, pp. 442-444.

dence to anyone . . ."[64] Nine days later Nietzsche had gone completely insane: collapsing in the street at the sight of a cabman beating a horse, he had awakened as the dual Godhead, Dionysus and the Crucified.

Overbeck had been greatly disturbed by the degree of Nietzsche's euphoria and agitation during the last few months of 1888, particularly by a proposal he had announced at the end of December to create an anti-German league in order to bring down the Reich.[65] Although Nietzsche had subsequently assured Overbeck that the letter had been written in a "very bad light," that he no longer recognized what he wrote, and that he would remain unchanged from what he had been for years to come,[66] Overbeck had his premonitions of impending catastrophe fulfilled when, the Sunday following New Year, Burckhardt appeared for the first time at his door, bringing with him a letter sent by Nietzsche the previous day.[67] This four page manuscript, skittering uncomfortably in the twilight between reality and the irrational, appeared as a commentary by its author on his fate, revealing him at once as a pensioned professor, God, and "every name in history." It was also a cry for help, embodied in a marginal note: "You may make any use of this letter you wish as long as you do not lower me in the estimation of the citizens of Basel."[68]

---

[64] Ibid., pp. 451-452.

[65] December 28, 1888. Ibid., pp. 452-453.

[66] December 31, 1888. Ibid., pp. 453-454.

[67] Overbeck, Die neue Rundschau (1906), p. 229.

[68] There is a text of this letter in Erich F. Podach, The Madness of Nietzsche, translated by F. A. Voigt (London and New York: Putnam, 1931), pp. 230-234.

Overbeck made plans to travel to Turin the next day, a decision the wisdom of which was proven on the eve of departure when he received his own letter from Nietzsche, who this time identified himself with Dionysus.[69] Immediate action was required if Nietzsche were to be rescued from incarceration at the hands of the Italian authorities.

Nietzsche readily acknowledged his old friend, even embracing him on his arrival with an abundance of tears, but, as Overbeck noted, he seemed uncertain as to his own identity. He periodically was seized by Dionysian frenzies, during which he would wildly gesticulate, play "eternity's buffoon," or pound on the piano to punctuate "sublime, marvelously clear-sighted, and unspeakably horrible things" he uttered concerning his role as the "successor to the dead God."[70] Fortunately, during the train ride back to Basel he was docile enough, singing in the night the words of his last poem, the Gondola Song, to a strange melody.[71]

---

[69] "To friend Overbeck and wife. Although so far you have demonstrated little faith in my ability to pay, I hope yet to prove that I am someone who pays his debts -- to you, for example. I am just having all antisemites shot. . . .Dionysus. Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit Overbeck, pp. 454, 460.

[70] Overbeck's letter to Peter Gast, January 15, 1889. Franz Overbeck, "Briefe an Peter Gast," Die neue Rundschau (1906), p. 28.

[71] It was from Ecce Homo: I stood on the bridge/Recently, in the brown night./Song came from afar;/It oozed in golden drops/away over the tremulous surface/Gondolas, lights, music --/It glided drunkenly into the twilight./My soul, a stringed instrument,/Sang invisibly touched,/A gondola song in secret/Trembling with multicolored bliss./--Was anyone listening? . . . Werke, II, p. 1093.

The judgment of the clinic in Basel was that Nietzsche was suffering from an atypical paralysis which was progressively eroding his mind, leaving only a vegetating organism behind. The decision was made to transfer him to the asylum connected with the University of Jena, and Overbeck was present at the "horrible, unforgettable moment" when Nietzsche was led by his mother, a doctor and an attendant across the Basel railroad station to the compartment reserved for his trip. Three days later he wrote to Peter Gast that he had been plagued by the thought

> that it would have been a far more genuine act of friendship to take his life than to lead the unfortunate man into the madhouse. I now have no other wish than that his life will be taken from him soon. At any rate I do not feel the least uncertain about it, and I think no one who had been at my side during these days would have felt otherwise. It is all over with Nietzsche! And I do not even need the confirmation of the expert judgment of the doctor who certifies a paralysis which can only progress and considers every cure out of the question, except for moments of calm. Judge yourself by one particular: Nietzsche could not even conceive for me the hatred I earned for robbing him of his freedom, an act of which I was guilty; the last words which I heard from him before his car was closed were an exuberant testimony of his friendship for me. Things have gone so far with this hero of freedom, he no longer thinks about freedom.[72]

A year later Overbeck stopped a few days at Jena to visit Nietzsche and received permission to walk and dine with him outside the walls of the asylum.

> [For any stranger] we were two old friends, and only I knew that our association now loved solely in the past. Nietzsche had greeted me at once on our first meeting at his mother's house as if nothing had undermined our old relationship, and so it went until my departure from Jena.
>
> . . . . . .

---

[72] January 20, 1889. Overbeck, Die neue Rundschau (1906), pp. 31-32.

> Nietzsche's communicativeness almost grew during our conversations, but these talks drew their content almost exclusively from the time before the outbreak of his insanity. . . . Under these conditions, our association -- it lasted three days -- was as if it had taken place from two different planets. I was on the old one which we had inhabited together until the outbreak of his madness; Nietzsche was on the new one. We could talk about things which belonged to that earlier period and even of these Nietzsche had only fragmentary memories . . . [He] referred mostly to external events, especially persons with whom he had connections (Wagner and others) . . . However, Nietzsche scarcely ever referred to his writings and especially to his still unfulfilled literary plans which had been the absorbing interest of his last lucid days. To be sure, not that these Jena conversations herein described lacked those flashes of brilliancy which recalled Nietzsche's highest aspirations; in this sense there was much that even surprised me at the time. On the whole, they had grown strikingly rare, and I had the impression that Nietzsche's spirit could be aroused only occasionally without losing itself in fantasy, while in the entire tenor of his behavior I had the impression of a 'calming down' going to depression or enervation.[73]

He saw Nietzsche for the last time in 1895, a silent shell of a man crouched "half-malevolently" on a stool.[74]

Yet, despite this terrible evidence of the ravage of Nietzsche's disease, Overbeck sometimes felt this insanity had the eerie aspect of the problematical, a mask pulled between self and world:

> His insanity, the outbreak of which no one witnessed closer than I, was a catastrophe which struck him like a bolt of lightning, according to my original conviction. It came on between Christmas, 1888, and the day of Epiphany, 1889. Before this, no matter how wrought up his condition may have been, Nietzsche could not have been insane. Still, I will not assert this as a fixed judgment. It has sometimes wavered in so far as I cannot escape the horrible idea in various periods of the mental illness of Nietzsche observed by me, at least in instances, that it was simulated. This impression can be completely explained only out of the experiences I have

---

[73] Ibid., pp. 327-328.

[74] Ibid., p. 329.

> had with the self-masquerading of Nietzsche. Still, here too I have finally bowed before the facts which knock down all personal thoughts and speculations.[75]

It was as if Nietzsche, finding himself in an impossible intellectual situation, had deliberately chosen the only remaining escape to avoid admitting he would ultimately be unable to fulfill his promises. From Overbeck's standpoint, Nietzsche's end was by no means predestined, but it was logical. Nietzsche's fate did not explain his life, which could be facilely dismissed as a series of episodes of expanding madness. Quite the reverse. His life put his fate in proper perspective, allowing its evaluation as an appropriate conclusion.[76]

After 1889, the actual date of Nietzsche's physical death was a matter of no more than abstract importance; the significant inhumation had already taken place. Nevertheless, the strength of Overbeck's moral sense of friendship, a feeling beyond the fortunes or even the attitudes of the participants, remained unaltered. He continued to perform the services that were implied by this sense as a matter of course, quite independent of impositions from the outside, precisely as he had taken upon himself the journey to Italy. He continued, provisionally, to oversee Nietzsche's financial affairs, particularly the pension, although the sphere of his responsibility had abruptly expanded.

He remained in Turin scarcely twenty-four hours but had used

---

[75] Ibid., p. 214.

[76] Ibid., p. 216.

part of that time to prepare Nietzsche's belongings for shipment, giving special attention to the unpublished manuscripts. He did not believe it wise to publish these works until the initial shock on the public of the news of Nietzsche's collapse had been dulled; neither did he want them lost. Accordingly, with Peter Gast's assistance, he acted as a broker with the Leipzig publisher C. G. Naumann, who was handling Nietzsche's books at that time, and carefully studied what he had, making extra copies where necessary.[77] Predictably, Der Antichrist interested him the most, although there was much in it he could not accept. He wrote to Peter Gast:

> All previous attempts to make a human figure out of him [Jesus] appear ridiculously abstract and only as illustrations of a rationalistic dogmatism next to the accomplishment of Nietzsche and the way that out of the original the person and also the humanity of the person spring forth. But the rest. Here, indeed, I can find nothing else than a lot of boundlessly acute and sovereign injustice.[78]

He was suspicious when, a year later, the unemployed archaeologist and free-lance social critic Julius Langbehn appeared at Jena to cure Nietzsche and proclaimed immediate success in reawakening his patient's intellectual interests. There was an indescribable air of instability and triviality about Langbehn. Overbeck's apprehensions were scarcely allayed by the appearance of Langbehn's anonymously published book Rembrandt als Erzieher (Rembrandt as Educator), a tur-

---

[77] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, II, pp. 294-299. See also Overbeck's correspondence with Peter Gast in which he discussed his actions, especially Die neue Rundschau (1906), pp. 30, 32-41.

[78] March 13, 1889. Overbeck, Die neue Rundschau (1906), p. 40.

gid, mystical, and nearly incoherent call for cultural reform presumably modeled on Nietzsche's third Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen; Overbeck dismissed this volume as containing about as much "stupidity" and "silliness" as truth and, as a whole, antipodal to Nietzsche.[79] Overbeck was absolutely correct. The cultural philistines made Langbehn's rambling essay an overnight bestseller and, in 1891, for the thirty-seventh edition the author added a chapter in praise of antisemitism.[80] When Overbeck learned that Langbehn was pressuring Nietzsche's mother for exclusive rights of guardianship over the burned out philosopher, decisive action could no longer be postponed. He took advantage of Basel's three day Shrove Tuesday holiday to go to Jena and there employed his considerable influence with the mother and Peter Gast to have Nietzsche removed from Langbehn's intrigues.

Overbeck always got along well with old Franziska Nietzsche, who leaned heavily on his advice and, until her death in 1897, kept him informed as to the evolution of her son's illness.[81] Nietzsche's sister, Elizabeth, was another matter. She disliked the Overbecks and freely laced her biography of her brother with derogatory comments about them, particularly Ida, who she accused of poisoning the atmosphere around Nietzsche with treachery in order to monopolize him as a

---

[79] Letter to Peter Gast, February 16, 1890. Overbeck, Die neue Rundschau (1906), pp. 50-51.

[80] Cf. Fritz Stern's section on Langbehn in Politics of Cultural Despair, pp. 129-227.

[81] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, II, pp. 308-321. Erich Podach collected the letters sent by Franziska Nietzsche to Overbeck in Der Kranke Nietzsche: Briefe seiner Mutter an Franz Overbeck (Vienna: Bermann-Fischer, 1937).

"soul-sister."[82] Irritably, Overbeck jotted abrasive marginal comments in his set of the biography:

> Frau Dr. Förster speaks . . . about things which at present no man on earth has the right to criticize and about which I myself could not undertake to speak without reserve. What does Frau Dr. Förster know about my nature?[83]

It was not only personal antipathy which caused Overbeck to accept only unavoidable contacts with the Nietzsche Archive and to insist his name never be connected with any of its activities; he even felt somewhat sorry for Elizabeth in that she was condemned to putter along in life beneath her brother's shadow with no real personality of her own. So long as the Archive had the aspect of merely expressing sisterly devotion it was not particularly objectionable, but when it became a shrine for Nietzsche's relics, with the limited intellectual gifts of Elizabeth supplying the interpretation of their meaning, it became a danger of the first order. He steadfastly refused to acknowledge Elizabeth's claim that virtually everything to which her brother had put his hand now belonged to her and left his Nietzsche correspondence to Bernoulli for publication.[84]

He also declined to attend the funeral arranged for Nietzsche by the Archive in 1900, a ceremony at which Peter Gast solemnly announced the canonization of his mentor.[85] Overbeck had nothing to

---

[82] Förster-Nietzsche, Life of Nietzsche, II, pp. 53-55,215, 224-225.

[83] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 293. Also, Overbeckiana, II, pp. 142-144.

[84] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, II, pp. 360-361, 401-416, 435-438.

[85] Overbeck, Die neue Rundschau (1906), p. 329. Kaufmann, Nietzsche, p. 58.

do with the bad consciences of the Archive members and associates; the person they interred had scant relation with the man he had known so well for thirty years.

IV. LATER LIFE

While Overbeck considered Nietzsche extraordinary in the amount of misfortune visited upon him,[1] Nietzsche customarily referred to "the lucky Overbeck."[2] If, on the surface at least, this latter judgment was accurate, it was certainly due in part to the auspicious environment of Basel. The spectacle of a professor of theology gainsaying his colleagues and erecting a barrier between himself and Christianity was something the city was able to take in stride, no feathers ruffled. Unlike most of the Germans who came to Switzerland to teach, Overbeck never really became part of his adopted homeland. He felt completely compatible with its eccentricities nonetheless. Basel was to him an umbrella, a unique sanctuary in which he was permitted to follow his studies without interference.[3]

In Basel he also encountered Pietism, a form of religious belief he had not seen before and which greatly impressed him:

> For Ritschl the pietistic form of Christianity is the most hateful. For me it is the single one under which a personal relationship to Christianity would be possible for me or at least would have been possible.[4]

---

[1] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, p. 13.

[2] Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), p. 158.

[3] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 168-169.

[4] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur. p. 179.

It was an influence he calculated second only to Nietzsche in firming the opposition to theology he expressed in Christlichkeit.[5] But, of course, there was a considerable difference between the respect shown by Overbeck to this enemy of the Reformverein and any conceivable possibility that he could have entered Christianity through the pietistic door. The time for conversion had passed long before, and the pietism of Basel was too ossified, too rooted in a shopkeeping past to be a serious alternative for him by 1870.[6]

In Basel's atmosphere of soporific placidity Overbeck flowered. The visible facets of his character were commonly seen as the very embodiment of his profession, a German scholar and teacher to the point of caricature, who meticulously, even compulsively, systematized his own notes and papers and who did not read books so much as consume them a sentence at a time.[7] He had in fact little life beyond that of the university, holding numerous positions within it -- including membership of the library committee and presidency of the Commission for Academic Lectures -- but none outside of it.[8] In his photographs his long, angular face invariably appeared somber and untroubled, his thin lips compressed, his passionless but incisive eyes judiciously measuring the world through the oval spectacles.

---

[5] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 12-13.

[6] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 49.

[7] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, II, p. 224.

[8] Overbeckiana, I, p. 12.

Among his colleagues at the university, with their elaborately groomed facial foliage, he was remarkable for the nakedness of his cheeks and chin as well as for his great mane of hair, brushed back over the edge of his collar.[9] He dressed neatly rather than fashionably and hurried through the streets in a broad-brimmed slouch hat, the tails of his overcoat flapping behind him. As he aged, his face became more lined, his hair turned white, his once erect body bowed forward, and his gait slowed, but his general appearance remained the same.

The restraint radiated by his person carried over into his efficacy in the classroom, with the result that his courses enjoyed little popularity. His lectures were monuments to the absolute hegemony of content over form, severely composed according to the principle that their function was to educate and not to entertain. From bell to bell he soberly intoned the long, tangled sentences scrawled on the manuscript before him, scrupulously avoiding verbal underlining of the key points and compromising with theatricalism only so far as to strike his desk occasionally by way of punctuation.[10] To overcome the necessarily debilitating character of his delivery and to escape weaknesses other teachers would finesse by adroit

---

[9] There are photographs of him printed facing the title pages of both volumes of Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche and in Professoren der Universität Basel aus fünf Jahrhunderten, Bildnisse und Würdigungen, edited by Andreas Staehelin (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1960), p. 199. In addition, there is an oil portrait facing the frontispiece of Selbstbekenntnisse.

[10] Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), pp. 148-150.

phraseology, he invested considerable effort in the creation and revision of his lectures, letting the reality of the subject matter and the depth of his scholarship provide their driving force.[11] As Eberhard Vischer observed, Overbeck was a hard critic of himself above all.[12]

A set of Overbeck's lectures, the components of a course he offered in 1891 and again in 1893, was published during World War I by Bernoulli under the title Vorgeschichte und Jugend der mittelalterlichen Scholastik (Early History and Youth of Medieval Scholasticism);[13] this volume reveals his talks proceeding with discipline, logic and a minimum of blatant conjecture, dwelling on individuals characteristic of particular movements and broad developments rather than the facts of chronology. His students were undoubtedly attracted by Overbeck's singularity, and so were his colleagues, who respected the value of his opinions as well as the soundness of his learning. Hans Heussler, one of his pupils and subsequently a professor of philosophy at Basel, wrote: "Overbeck was indeed in so many things our model, almost ideal and therefore unattainable -- above all, however, in his absolute objectivity, which was all the less self-evident since it had to get along with a somewhat caustic temperament."[14] Karl Joël compared him with an aristocrat of the Old

---

[11] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 13.

[12] Quoted in Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), p. 150.

[13] Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1917.

[14] Quoted in Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), p. 152.

Regime, an advocate of the highest world culture who rejected all that was petty, narrow or rude.[15]

The orientalist, Adam Mez, a generation younger than Overbeck, wrote of him:

> He was to us the representative of a totally erudite culture with its breeding, its reverence before that which seemed insignificant to the boorish, its delight in great men and deeds. For us he belonged to a secret conscience, a hidden public: what would Overbeck say to that, we asked ourselves about much that we thought or read. He belonged to us younger men. He acknowledged himself to us and was happy when he met us. And for us a society in which we encountered him was saved.[16]

It was recognized by many of Overbeck's contemporaries who knew him that he was more than a good scholar: he was a good European, at once a bridge to the past and to the future. Although he did not feel obliged to do more than work with the evolution of his own mind, he was as far as Nietzsche from seeing any real value in the life of an academician who was actually no more than an inert silo into which poured the harvested trivia of the ages for safe storage. One fragment in his papers reads:

> Even knowledge has its selfishness and it must submit to questioning of its methods before it is awarded unconditional value. Knowledge has in itself no purpose which secures it such unconditional value. It ought to produce and widen the insight and is to this end only a means. If it is blind, on the other hand, and follows only methods which secure it its own existence but make it unfruitful for its purpose, if it attends to problems which feed nothing but its own

---

[15] Joël, Die neue Rundschau (1905), pp. 1145.

[16] Quoted in Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), p. 153.

> forces, then it is ripe for the fire and not worth the quantity of misery and the tiresomeness which are inseparable from it.[17]

Beyond his studies, part of the process of self-development lay in music. Overbeck's love of music was constant. He pursued the course of post-Wagnerian composition with avid interest if not sympathy and though nothing of riding to Zurich for a concert.[18] Part of the process also lay in literature. His private library was extensive, and he kept himself abreast of what was current through the French, German and English monthlies to which he subscribed. The Christmas presents he dispatched were generally books, and, in the course of time, he raised to a fine art the ability to match titles to the personalities of the intended recipients.[19] Besides the classical authors, he was familiar with the works of contemporaries such as Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Ibsen, Gottfried Keller, and even, to a certain extent, Mark Twain.[20] He despised "modern" and sensationalist literature, especially its most pestiferous form, the popular press. If literature was an agent of culture, he complained, then these grotesqueries were agents of barbarism and must be avoided at all costs.[21]

---

[17] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 29.

[18] Ibid., p. 31.

[19] Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), p. 155.

[20] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 31. Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit Overbeck. passim.

[21] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 252-253.

Since he tended to view the relationship of popularity and ultimate significance as being in inverse proportion, he treated the absence of measurable effect of his own writings on readers with nonchalance. He had not been totally ignored, at least by other theologians. He had, for example, created some excitement when he had asserted in his 1872 paper Über den pseudojustinischen Brief an Diognet (Concerning the Pseudo-Justinian Letter to Diogenes)[22] that a presumed second century document was actually a fourth century forgery and when he had attacked Harnack in his 1898 study Die Bischofslisten und die apoltolische Nachfolge in der Kirchengeschichte des Eusebius (The Bishop Lists and the Apostolic Successors in Eusebius' Church History).[23] This agitation readily passed, however, and had had little to do with the actual substance of Overbeck's arguments.

For all of the devastation that Christlichkeit visited upon both theology and the pretensions of modern culture, even this effort aroused only slight interest. Between the two editions of the essay, Overbeck recorded a mere thirty references to the book in German and English journals, most of them offhand or unfavorable.[24] He observed, correctly, that few of his would-be readers seemed able either to understand what he was saying or to take it seriously, although this protest has a somewhat peculiar ring to itself in

---

[22] Basel: C. Schultze, 1872.

[23] Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1898.

[24] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 150-152.

view of the fact that it came from an author who was so insistent that this book was primarily a monologue, composed for his own benefit rather than the edification of others.[25]

Outside Overbeck's immediate circle of friends, the most unequivocating endorsement of his views came from Eduard von Hartmann, who declared Christlichkeit "surprisingly sincere and candid" and cited it several times, along with Lagarde's pamphlet, in his own Die Selbstzersetzung des Christentums und die Religion der Zukunft (The Disintegration of Christianity and the Religion of the Future).[26] Hartmann shared Overbeck's verdict on such specific problems as the relation between Christianity and antiquity and the "irreligiosity" of liberal Protestant theology; he also insisted on the absolute antipathy of Christianity and culture.[27] Still, even Hartmann only intended this analysis to play background for his own speculations concerning the "religion of the future," panmonotheism, a Schopenhauerian blend of the best parts of Christianity and Buddhism.[28] He thereby parted company with Overbeck and showed his true colors. At the time, Overbeck detected the odor of the priest lingering about Hartmann and later wrote that Hartmann was as much as apologist for Christianity as Harnack. Both inflicted on the original state of the

---

[25] Ibid., pp. 158-166.

[26] Berlin: Carl Duncker, 1874. See pp. 16, 24, 66, 70, 82.

[27] Ibid., pp. 21, 25, 61-90.

[28] Ibid., pp. 97-122.

religion whatever transmutations seemed necessary to make it palatable to modern man; the only important distinction was that while Harnack proceeded historically, Hartmann proceeded metaphysically.[29]

That the sweeping condemnation of theological hypocrisy embodied in Christlichkeit should have been generally discounted by readers was to be anticipated. It was of at least equal consequence that the appearance of the book produced no alterations in Overbeck's approach to his profession. He consistently distinguished the methods and objectives of a writer from those of a teacher. The former, Overbeck felt, addressed himself to an unknown audience, an undifferentiated mass bound to the writer only by contemporaneity. His main purpose must be to find recognition and intelligibility among these potential listeners, and this end could be accomplished only through unconditional revelation of the writer through his works. This sort of problem was of no concern to the teacher, who has been provided with a limited and identifiable audience as a first act. His obligation, then, was to instruct those before him in a designated field with minimal intrusion of his own personality. The activities of a writer have to do with seeking in the darkness; those of a teacher deal with particular seekers. To Overbeck the argument that writers are also instructors was sheer arrogance, falsely based on the displacement of the concrete teacher-pupil relationship to some ideal realm. Teaching was immediate, verbal and extant only where there

---

[29] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 217-218.

was personal contact with students.[30]

On this basis Overbeck felt that it was incumbent on him not to act in the classroom any differently after the publication of his book than he had before.[31] As a university professor he did not feel justified in engaging in competition for the souls of the young or turning the minds of his students into battle grounds where his own agnosticism and the theological Christianity of his colleagues could engage in a battle to the death. The doubt he felt was a purely internal thing, and it was sufficient that it should remain such, a burden only on himself. His sole duty was to explain the New Testament and to teach church history in so far as was possible without bias, thereby preparing his pupils for their examinations.[32] Overbeck was not indulging in duplicity or cynically underestimating the ability of theology students. He did not, after all, set out to deceive his classes about his religious viewpoints, only to leave them out of account. He was too imbued with skepticism to presume himself the vessel into which had been poured the answers to the riddles of life. There was, he assumed, no method to discover these answers. Solutions could be transitory at best and only relevant on individual bases. His renunciation could actually be construed as a mark of respect.

It also became an increasingly difficult stance to maintain as

---

[30] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 187-188. Selbstbekenntnisse, pp. 134-135.

[31] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, p. 173.

[32] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, pp. 131-134, 145-146. Christlichkeit, pp. 183-185. Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 63.

he continued to publish. It was impossible to ignore offhandedly the mounting number of book reviews or the essays, and it was unsatisfactory merely to introduce major concepts from these works into lectures while carefully masking the unChristian overtones. Overbeck became the victim of his own logic increasingly and inescapably after 1873. By his own definition he could not be both a teacher and a writer, particularly since in the one guise he worked in behalf of theology and in the other in opposition to it. Like the other intellectuals of his time, Overbeck experienced his own religious crisis -- not, to be certain, in the sense that he was caught between Christianity and its antithesis, but because his radical concept of criticism, developing continually into a sharper form, was in basic contradiction to the "indolence" of his nature. Predisposed to intellectual dissection and final judgment, he was nevertheless too much of an advocate of peace to wish to spend his life as a crusader. Effective polemicism, he felt, required an unrelenting attack at the roots of whatever had been marked for annihilation; anything less would inevitably result in an effect opposite to that intended. Reckless delight in destruction was foreign to Overbeck's character. Nonaggressiveness suited his skepticism better.[33]

Resolution of the conflicting demands of mind and spirit was not possible but accommodation was, by restricting critical evaluations to the purely private sphere. Studien zur Geschichte der alten Kirche was his last book as far as he was concerned, and he never wrote the

---

[33] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, pp. 137-138.

promised sequel. After 1875 he published mainly in non-theological journals, and even this practice was ended by the mid 1880's. Only the Universitätsprogramme remained, partially to ease his conscience. Overbeck had bought his way out of an intolerable situation at the price of resigning himself to virtual silence;[34] certainly he had few regrets when a bad heart and several years of general physiological deterioration forced his retirement in 1897. By this time the preparation of lectures had become a suffocating necessity, agonizing in its divisiveness.

There is an impression often conveyed of Overbeck in old age as a sarcastic and embittered curmudgeon, closed within himself and viewing the events of the outside world through jaundiced eyes. This description must contain a grain of veracity in view of Bernoulli's insistence that Overbeck was actually only exasperated in the face of advancing theological nihilism and was exhibiting the fierce, rash bravery of a youth by demanding more of himself than he possessed power to deliver.[35] Of course, much of this caviling about Overbeck's acerbic personality has originated among his theological opponents, and most of it has been occasioned by his attacks on Harnack during the last few years of his life, breaking twenty years of good relations between the two men. Overbeck had printed a congenial review of Harnack's doctoral dissertation in 1874,[36] had praised him

---

[34] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 190-192.

[35] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, pp. 140-143.

[36] In Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 18 (May 2, 1874), columns 585-586.

six years later in Zur Geschichte des Kanons,[37] and in 1885 had written Nietzsche:

> Little Harnack is still my single reader among theologians, as he has just now proven to me by the first volume of his History of Dogma and a very kind accompanying letter. I have against his receptivity only excessiveness, namely that it chokes on too much and too many kinds of things and permits him no clear and really cogent expression to his ideas.[38]

When Harnack founded the Theologische Literaturzeitung in 1876 in collaboration with Emil Schurer, Overbeck wrote reviews and articles for it, the only theological journal with which he consented to be associated. From Christlichkeit on, Harnack acknowledged a sizeable debt to Overbeck, the writer who had caused the scales to fall from his eyes and revealed to him the apostasy of modern theologians.[39] Overbeck, he once said, was the "first church historian of Germany."[40] Like his mentor, Harnack had learned from Baur the necessity of representing the past without preconception and with cognizance of the limits of historical knowledge. Unlike Overbeck, Harnack blended this insight with considerable extracts from Kant, Hegel, romanticism, and above all, Ritschl, to the end of a theology active in representing Christianity within culture. The distinction between the two men became obvious as Harnack moved into the upper

---

[37] Zur Geschichte des Kanons. Zwei Abhandlungen (Schloss-Chemnitz: Ernst Schmeitzner, 1880), p. 73.

[38] December 26, 1885. Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit Overbeck, p. 321.

[39] Agnes von Zahn-Harnack, Adolf von Harnack, p. 63.

[40] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 218.

echelons of the German ecclesiastical apparatus.[41] Harnack's readiness to be a servant and advisor to Wilhelm II was the final, crushing blow for Overbeck, suggesting that Harnack was ultimately no different than Bunsen. Overbeck hastened to proclaim that the author of such dubious books as Das Wesen des Christentums (The Essence of Christianity) and the future president of the Evangelical-Social Congress was by no stretch of the imagination a student of his.

The first opportunity to make such a demonstration came in his Universitätsprogramm of 1898 where, taking advantage of the recent publication of a second gargantuan volume in Harnack's study of old Christian literature, Overbeck could grapple with his new adversary on the familiar ground of Eusebius' church history. In the introduction to this careful dissection of the inadequacies of Harnack's scholarship, Overbeck declared he was lodging a protest

> against the phase into which Harnack's literary activity had entered years ago and in which it has become so unbearably broad and dispersed in form and so overburdened in content with assumptions of a subjectivity that no necessity can excuse in science.[42]

In the second edition of Christlichkeit, Overbeck included among the theological types he had condemned a generation before,

---

[41] There is a recent study of Harnack in a series of books on modern theologians produced under the editorship of Jaroslav Pelikan: G. Wayne Glick, The Reality of Christianity: A Study of Adolf von Harnack as Historian and Theologian (New York: Harper and Row, 1967). Neither Glick nor the biography of Agnes von Zahn-Harnack, the two most recent full length works on this theologian, give much space to the Overbeck-Harnack relationship.

[42] Overbeck, Die Bischofslisten, p. 6.

Harnack's "modern" theology, the aim of which he said seemed to be to demonstrate not the essence of Christianity but its irrelevance.[43] By far the most ambitious and original of his broadsides against Harnack was a proposed companion piece to the old Christlichkeit, a Harnack lexicon composed of brief, biting, polemical essays against the various chimeras perpetrated by the theologian, all strictly organized by key-words in alphabetical order. This project was Overbeck at top of his form, cutting to the bone without mercy, sparing no flaw from his expert scalpel. Even in Bernoulli's expurgated and abbreviated version, the only one published to date, this pamphlet was a masterful demonstration of invective and powerful control of thought, belying any suggestion of mental incapacitation or senility. "Harnack's productivity," read one entry, "appears to me the most plausible foundation of his reputation. . . . Harnack produces like Nature according to the recipe: quantity brings and assures success!"[44] Under the heading "Mastery," Overbeck wrote:

> A master simplifies, unravels, illuminates, confines the sphere of the problematical, the merely conjectural, in his science. Harnack does the opposite; he complicates, entangles, obscures, expands the sphere of the problematical far beyond all unavoidable measure.[45]

It would be erroneous to dismiss the Harnack lexicon as mere vituperation by an irrascible old man against a prospering rival.

---

[43] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 200-217.

[44] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 209.

[45] Ibid., p. 223.

The work was a Streitschrift composed in the grand manner of Nietzsche's Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen, no more a personal attack on Harnack than David Strauss was a polemic against Strauss or Schopenhauer als Erzieher was a discussion of Schopenhauer. Overbeck's suppressed lexicon was aimed at a state of mind, that of the cultural philistine, for whom mediocrity, superficiality, popularity, self-satisfaction and intellectual veneer were the final standard. Harnack, the embodiment and preceptor of the cult of modernity, was the focus of Overbeck's attack as a symbol, not as an individual. As a matter of conviction Overbeck was hewing close to the guidelines set forth by Nietzsche in Ecce Homo:

> My practice of war may be summarized in four propositions, First: I attack only causes which are victorious -- And at times I wait until they are victorious. Second: I attack only causes against which I cannot expect to find allies, against which I stand alone -- against which I shall compromise myself alone. I have never taken a step in public which was not compromising: that is my criterion of doing what is right. Third: I never attack persons; I only avail myself of the person as of a strong magnifying glass with which one can render visible a general but creeping calamity which it is otherwise hard to get hold of . . . Fourth: I attack only causes in which any personal difference is out of the question, and in which any background of unwholesome experience is lacking.[46]

Despite the calculated isolation of Overbeck's position, Harnack's response, or lack of it, to the efforts to separate him from Overbeck's radicalism must have been galling. Harnack mildly dismissed Die Bischofslisten with protests concerning how much he had learned from Overbeck in the past and regrets that this study contained

---

[46] Werke, II, p. 1079.

nothing he could use.[47] Harnack greeted the new Christlichkeit with silence, an action which was supposed to demonstrate respect for the influence of the first edition on him, as Overbeck later learned to his chagrin from a mutual friend. "I possess all sorts of published and epistolary indications of the influences I had on him," Overbeck sourly noted in his lexicon under the heading "I!" "Among them not a single one confirms the stated illusion or even speaks in general about my Christlichkeit."[48]

With all of the substantial literary activity after 1897, in many respects more than he had indulged in during the whole previous course of his life, Overbeck was quite conscious that he was gradually dying. Keenly aware of both the beauties and insufficiencies of the world, Overbeck did not view his approaching demise with particular apprehension; the fate of Nietzsche was graphic evidence that there were experiences far worse than death. Although the young tend to forget the fact, death is an inseparable and impenetrable companion of life, a delicate riddle which must be met by each individual but which is not the key to all the riddles of the world. Because death is the enigmatic conclusion for all life, it must be faced not with resignation but with honesty and openness.

> In any case [he wrote at sixty-two] I much prefer Montaigne's and Spinoza's way of looking at death to the Christian. It affects far less than Christianity to want to console us about death, and moreover it does not have the desperate character of Christianity in the consolation which it may

---

[47] Harnack reviewed the work in Theologische Literaturzeitung (1898), columns 657-659.

[48] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 219.

> offer. Let us seek, rather, instead of wanting consolation about death at any price, in as much honesty as possible to find within death the ability to look more upon that which it can be for us in our sphere rather than that which it destroys there. Better that it protects us from illusions to which we are exposed so constantly anyhow, than that it allows us to go away with a new and greater one.[49]

This conception of death, which emphasized its ability to eliminate those illusions that tended to distort life may have been a pagan one but, as Nigg pointed out, it provided what was necessary for the retention of serenity.[50] When his death came on June 26, 1905, Overbeck was quite prepared to meet it. For several years he had been in the process of divesting himself of those university offices he had retained after his retirement and by the end of January, 1905, had completed the arrangements with Bernoulli for the disposition of his papers, including the Nietzsche correspondence. In fact, one of his last projects was to try to crush a rumour that he had been responsible for the suggestion, still proposed with some frequency, that Nietzsche's insanity had been a product of syphilis.[51]

Six weeks prior to his fatal heart attack and in the wake of a less severe one, Overbeck had come to a final reckoning of sorts with theology in a "spiritual testament," a last statement of the degree of his religious skepticism and an assertion of his conviction

---

[49] Ibid., pp. 297-298.

[50] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 35.

[51] Overbeckiana, I, pp. 217-219. This diagnosis was first advanced by the Leipzig psychiatrist Paul Julius Mobius in his book Über das Pathologische bei Nietzsche (1902). Mobius had discussed the question of Nietzsche's mental collapse with Overbeck, but the source of his conclusion was an examination of the medical records at Basel and Jena. Podach also investigated these records a generation later and decided this conclusion to be unproven. On this subject, see Kaufmann, Nietzsche, pp. 58-59, 371-372.

that human salvation, if it were to come at all, must be an act of the individual in his own behalf:

> What I have discovered up to now in life concerning the progress of the world or its history in general partially through studies . . . took from me long ago my childhood belief in God but not that in man, which, wherever it may have come to me, has remained until now. . . . Religion has no other foundation than myth and legend, that is, so far as there can be thought about its scientific foundation at all, it is to be secured from myth or legend. Just for that reason religion has no value for human salvation and not even for one who only has in view the production of a pure and general association of humanity. For legend is itself a human work, only this, and cannot reach out in its efficacy beyond the limits of humanity. The redeeming association of humanity which we obviously cannot do without for our 'salvation' -- that is, for our resurrection out of the world-crush -- must have its basis completely and solely in us. Knowing to act in addition is then for us nothing more. If we cannot expect deliverance from ourselves, the individual from himself or from his species, then it is for us generally incalculable. If, on the other hand, the concept of salvation exists among us, it can stem only out of our midst and work universally only therein.[52]

Even here there is nothing of the clarion of absolute confidence or defiance, and the language, in its subtle vagueness, retains a feeling of the problematical which constantly tormented his thinking. It is even questionable to what extent this "last theology" may be accepted as a final position. Two days after writing it, Overbeck asked his wide to burn the paper, but she did not, preserving it as a document of things about which he had often spoken.[53] Inexplicably, at the same time he was penning his obser-

---

[52] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, pp. 47-48.

[53] Overbeckiana, II, pp. 134-135.

vations which isolated him so completely within his profession, he was being awarded a doctorate in divinity by the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, an honor he had declined once before in 1899 because of his attitude toward theology and Christianity in general.[54]

To the end of his life, Overbeck was plagued by irresolvable dichotomies, irresolvable not because he was indecisive but because neither of the two alternatives of the either-or was such that he could be unconditionally embraced by a reasonable man. In ambiguous situations, where diametric opposites are necessarily fused together and dependent upon one another for sustenance, ultimate solutions do not exist, only individual adjustments which preserve equilibrium as well as integrity and identity. This realization was, at once, the tragedy and enigma of Overbeck's life and why his attitudes appear so adaptable to the twentieth century. Anywho who dismisses his life as comparable to the average academician's, quiescent, non-descript and embodied in either scholarship or abstract symbols, has made a fundamental error and missed a point of immeasurable significance.

---

[54] There is a discussion of this episode and selected correspondence between Overbeck and James Donaldson, Principal of St. Andrews, in Vischer's introduction to Selbstbekenntnisse, pp. 20-41. Vischer is probably correct in asserting that Donaldson had no real conception of what Overbeck's radicalism involved, or he would not have been so persistent in offering the degree.

PART TWO

OVERBECK'S CONCEPTION OF HISTORY, CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

V. BASIC PRINCIPLES

Like Blaise Pascal, for whom he had considerable empathy, Overbeck had the boundless capacity to perceive the dissonance contained with seeming harmony, finding complexity and variance where others saw simplicity and unity. Both documented the ambivalence of existence and marked the limits of human reason in the face of humanity's demand for final answers. Both, as students of Montaigne, took doubt as the fundamental act and assumed that the only legitimate starting point for comprehension of the world was encompassed by perception and fact, not a priori assumptions or universal principles. There was, of course, an elementary difference between them: Pascal escaped skepticism in the end through a leap of faith while Overbeck never viewed such an act of unreason as an option that was open to him. His skepticism tied him absolutely to rationalism and corrosively exposed the unsufficiencies of all the philosophical systems with which it came into contact.

Overbeck never made the mistake of confounding speculation and solution, insisting always that there were some questions sensible men could not even pretend to answer with finality. This assertion by no means left him dangling in a philosophic void, never rising beyond the status of an apostle of nihilism. The nature of his life as well as the men he befriended required him to develop

certain philosophical positions and acknowledge certain tendencies of his own thought. Normally he expressed himself in terms of dualisms, co-existent in tandem rather than open to synthesis and gave provisional resolutions on the basis of greater or lesser probabilities.

His historical sense led him to condemn romanticism as totally out of contact with the real world. Romantics blurred the distinction between past and present, secreted an illusory shimmer of life over that which has been long dead, and ultimately obstructed the erection of a correct relationship between men and their history. Moving somnambulantly through their wild fantasies, romantics indulged the absurdity that it was possible for an individual to abandon his own time for another. Overbeck felt classicism was by far the more realistic in that it sought in the past only standards which would permit modern man the same original and pure attitudes toward life that antiquity enjoyed. Classicism recognized exactly which elements were adaptable from history to modern conditions and which were not.[1]

This argument was comparable to the one he advanced concerning the merits of realism as opposed to idealism.

> The idealization of things [he wrote] is the most subtle method which men who are sated by life have found to blow out the light of life in things, to suck out life, to empty them of life. . . . All idealization, whatever its disposition may be, is a symptom of moderation which men have lost in their relation to life.[2]

---

[1] Overbeckiana, II, p. 132.

[2] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 241.

Realism, on the other hand, was defined as the endeavor to make the world comprehensible within the human sphere. To be certain, circumstances might well allow widening the area of this sphere, but the boundaries remained nonetheless and had to be respected. Circumspection and rationalism were the two great strengths of realism and care had to be continually exercised that the "shipwrecks of all idealistic systems of explaining the world" did not provide material for realism also to engage in overextension or, worse, fanaticism.[3]

Judgment for Overbeck was relatively easy in these two cases, since the yardstick of his own skepticism immediately exposed the worthlessness of one member of each of the pairs. Such clarity was not generally discernible in these matters. The futility of making a real choice, for example, between pessimism and optimism, was quite evident to him:

> Pessimism and optimism, altruism and individualism -- woe to the thinking that allows itself to be taken between the scissor blades of such alternatives! The world is what it is -- it is exquisite and ghastly at the same time. It is not possible to admire the world enough and no more possible to represent it; man, in his relation to it, can do nothing better or higher than to acknowledge it, to take the world as it is and to allow prevalence of the indifference of his value judgment about it. Whether the world is good or bad, beautiful or hateful, man cannot decide, and what does it matter![4]

Along side this good natured, live-and-let-live commentary must be placed the fact that although Overbeck fully recognized the long standing pedigree and interminable character of the rivalry

---

[3] Ibid., pp. 135, 241-242.

[4] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, p. 165.

between optimism and pessimism, he just as fully believed the latter approach the most fruitful. Actually it would be inconceivable that he could have been a close friend of Nietzsche and felt otherwise. Nietzsche was not the decisive element in the development of his pessimism, however, for Overbeck had discovered Schopenhauer in 1860 while in Berlin, five years before Nietzsche had picked up a second hand copy of Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (The World as Will and Representation) in a Leipzig bookstore. Schopenhauer was the only German alternative to Hegel's idealism at that time and a decade later he was the only antidote to the mindless optimism and cultural vacuity which accompanied the birth of the Empire. In 1873 Overbeck defended him solidly against Treitschke's disparagements:

> When you find the man 'absolutely small,' I can only contradict you and say: I find him absolutely great. He is a great man, great in his virtues and gifts, great in his faults, and that he stands before us so clearly in both we are indebted to the virtue which he possessed above all and as hardly anyone else, his veracity.[5]

Overbeck was sympathetic toward Schopenhauer's refutation of goal and sense in history and, even more, toward his rejection of the state; "the state can be taken too seriously," Overbeck admonished Treitschke.[6] Above all, Schopenhauer demonstrated his greatness by the degree to which his philosophy had penetrated every facet of his life, advancing beyond mere scholastic abstractions to a viable method of relating its founder to the world. He embodied what he taught, proving both his own good faith and the genuineness

---

[5] November 14, 1873. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 90. [6] Ibid., p. 91

of his philosophy.[7] A philosophy that did not have perceptible influence on the existence of its host was not valid. For this reason, and with one eye on his own manner of living, Overbeck decided that a pessimist must surrender all thoughts of working in behalf of his own time or be branded a quack; whoever indulges in reformism has to believe in his era and be convinced the beneficial changes can be made.[8]

For all of this, Overbeck was not a follower of Schopenhauer, whose name did not appear with any frequency in his writings, and insisted that the major themes of Christlichkeit did not derive from Schopenhauer but were illuminated by him.[9] Many points in Schopenhauer's philosophy bothered Overbeck but perhaps none troubled him as much as Treitschke's rebuke that "the entire world of love" was closed to Schopenhauer and his ilk.[10] Overbeck had to grant that absolute, radical pessimism was neither possible nor desirable, that a certain amount of love for the world had to temper all aversion to it. Blanket renunciations destroyed too much of value in human existence. Schopenhauer's pessimism displayed ancient wisdom in its perceptions but no more than any other philosophy was it the guardian

---

[7] Ibid., pp. 140-141.

[8] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 30.

[9] Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 91.

[10] Letter to Overbeck, October 28, 1873. Treitschkes Briefe, III, p. 376.

of the significance of life.[11]

Overbeck found this same Janus aspect in the problem of human morality; neither of the two faces, egoism and altruism, was capable of existing alone:

> Nothing can occur in the human world without the individual but it is just as true that the individual may do nothing therein by himself. Humanity must be taken jointly responsible and no value judgment that would decide about the order of precedence between individual and totality within it has the slightest significance for its life and existence. The claims of the individual and the totality are completely equal; to set them at variance and to want to rend their given unity is the height of madness, for it must remain a completely empty act.[12]

Disentanglement of the individual from the collective might have been a metaphysical impossibility according to this formula, but Overbeck's loyalties were solidly invested in the former. He ceaselessly defended individualism against whatever aimed at crippling its freedom: the "millstones" of church and state, the corruptive mediocrity of public opinion, the perniciousness of ideologies and mass movements, even the need for a deity, whether external or internal.[13]

> Whoever really and strongly relies on himself in the world must also find the courage to rely on nothing. Finally, the individual cannot ever think he has found a substitute for God in himself. When man renounces

---

[11] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 29, 249. Nigg, Franz Overbeck, pp. 32, 69.

[12] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, pp. 165-166.

[13] See, for example, his letter to Treitschke of November 1, 1873. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, pp. 98-99.

> God, he relies inexorably on himself, and when he is driven to rely on himself, he renounces God. Whatever might be the despair of a man about his isolation, if he turns back by chance to God, he can obtain solace in the very least. Abandoning oneself is no sure path to God, but the idea of discovering God again in oneself is even more hopeless. Whoever relies on himself must also endure it by himself -- woe to him if he cannot do it! . . . Only without God is the individualist free to live. If he cannot say farewell to God, his individualism either is not genuine or he has not yet developed to its complete freedom.[14]

Skepticism, in brief, was the liberator of individualism and its human potential. Whoever would be an individualist must be strong enough to live with uncertainty and willing to accept a position that was actually a loss of foothold. Humanity could go forward in no other way.[15]

The enemies of individualism were legion, stemming not only from the modernized techniques of repression evolved in the course of the nineteenth century but also from a weakness of self-discipline, the obligation of self-mastery which must accompany liberty of action.[16] This aspiration to internal order and law was an aristocratic quality, but individualism was a product of the middle classes and easiest to achieve in this estate. As a result it rarely possessed distinction and tone and was too ready to fall into "philistine freedom," superficial, smug and unproductive. This disease was hereditary to the

---

[14] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 286.

[15] Ibid., pp. 77, 295.

[16] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, p. 165.

bourgeoisie, concluded Overbeck, and even the great hero of individualism, Nietzsche, could not completely escape its symptoms.[17]

One had to battle unrelentingly to maintain pristine individuality, and in the process there was no way to avoid suffering from its eternal companion, gnawing and terrible loneliness. Overbeck wrote in 1899:

> When I look back on the course of my life, I certainly do not see standing before me a great, self-reliant man but a little one who keeps to himself and holds himself apart in the great mass to which he belongs.[18]

The world has not been created in behalf of the individual, and if the individual wishes to find himself within it, he must be prepared to bear all costs. The prospect of future societies greater, more civil and more human than any yet seen make the present trials eminently worthwhile.[19]

On the tripod of rationalistic skepticism, modified pessimism and humanistic individualism Overbeck constructed his approach to history. Like Burchkardt, he distrusted all philosophies of history, for man has not been privileged to know first beginnings or ultimate ends but only to observe the continuum that lies between. The historian did not seek out ideas but watched dispassionately as they grew out of his subject matter.[20]

---

[17] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 287.

[18] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, p. 155.

[19] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 287, 295-296.

[20] Bernoulli, Basler Jahrbuch (1906), p. 140.

> Historical writing is a descriptive science. It fulfills its task most completely when it has presented the historical facts of the case as correctly as possible; great historians strive after that above all. For that reason, in any case, Ranke alone is a great historian in that, whatever is said about the narrowness of his horizons, through this narrowness he endeavors successfully to guard the essentially descriptive character of historical science.[21]

There was no other real task for the historian than to contemplate and record. Overbeck expressed unfettered scorn for the historian who played to the galleries by combining scholarship with journalism and "decorated his historical work with picturesque descriptions of villages and landscapes which he has never seen and intimate character pictures of the Apostle Paul, of Nero and Seneca, as if he had ever seen such men up close,"[22] in order to pose as a man of letters. This man was only a novelist, who had lost sight of the question concerning what really happened and only speculated on what might have occurred.[23] He gave his own position in the forward to Studien zur Geschichte der alten Kirche:

> Of course I am far from claiming that the scholar's chamber is the highest observatory from which one can oversee -- I will not say the world, for no one can oversee this with the exception of theologians -- human affairs. But I also do not understand why one should see nothing from there, and I do not share the opinion of so many present day scholars who think they get to see more when they stand half-way in the street.[24]

---

[21] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, pp. 69-70.

[22] Overbeck, Studien zur Geschichte der alten Kirche, pp. iv-v.

[23] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, pp. 113-114.

[24] Overbeck, Studien zur Geschichte der alten Kirche, pp. iv-v.

It is beyond the scope of this study to give more than passing notice to the nineteenth century theologians whose influence may be traced in Overbeck's writings or the categories to which he gave attention. Still, with respect to Overbeck's methodology, it would be useful to say something more concrete about Baur, whom Overbeck called "the model historical master" of his youth,[25] for a comparison of the two men will provide indication unattainable in any other way of the extent to which Overbeck's approach to church history was at once a continuation of Baur's achievements and at the same time a unique departure.

Like Overbeck, Baur was a reserved academician who spent a relatively uneventful life first as a professor of classics in the seminary at Blaubeuren and ultimately as a church historian at Tübingen, teaching there for thirty-four years until a fatal stroke in 1860. He has been commonly lumped with the Hegelians and was so classified by Overbeck,[26] although his basic views owed much more to Schelling and Schleiermacher, with elements of Hegelianism circumspectly adopted only after his intellectual approach had achieved its maturity.[27] No orator, his quiet independence, his integrity, his learning and the quality of his critical judgment still combined to produce a tremendous impact on those who had contact with him; even

---

[25] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 180.

[26] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, p. 3.

[27] This thesis is argued convincingly in Hodgson, Formation of Historical Theology.

Wilhelm Dilthey considered him the greatest theologian of the nineteenth century.[28]

Overbeck, who experienced Baur's effect in only second hand fashion, testified to the power of this impression:

> Whatever enthusiasm is to be obtained from mere books, I conceived for Baur; he was my ideal for my scholarly vocation. But I owe him even more: a task which not only extended into my teaching profession but extended far beyond me. And this, to be sure, thanks to the liberty which I took for myself to look out beyond the church history horizon of Baur. For with no other assistance than his I resolved to imitate in the whole field of the history of the Christian church what he had done before me in that of early Christianity.[29]

In the introduction to the first volume of his church history Das Christentum und die christliche Kirche der drei ersten Jahrhunderte (Christianity and the Christian Church of the First Three Centuries) Baur wrote: "My standpoint is in one word the purely historical one, the sole purpose of which is to comprehend the historically given in its pure objectivity, so far as is generally possible . . . I am, in any case, conscious of no other aspiration."[30] This aspiration was his legacy to Overbeck, an expression of the absolute necessity of objectivity in historical research, restraining subjectivity to the point where it becomes possible for the scholar to describe with precision what has occurred in the past.[31] The historian was not to sup-

---

[28] Quoted in ibid., p. 36.

[29] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 6-7.

[30] Tübingen: L. F. Fues, 1853. P. vi.

[31] The following discussion of Baur's historical principles is largely based upon Hodgson, Formation of Historical Theology, pp. 142-200.

pose himself a creative artist but a mirror in which the reality of the past events could be reflected. By allowing himself to be absorbed into his subject matter, by excluding whatever was alien to this process, the historian permitted history to demonstrate its own direction and movement, rather than imposing them from the outside.

Baur did not content himself with the assertion of absolute disinterestedness or lack of bias alone, for he was convinced that history was much too complex to have its significance revealed by mere chronicling or a cause and effect analysis. He required that the historian approach the subject with categories of thought which could penetrate to the core of historical movement, but which were also sufficiently flexible to be modified or corrected as research proceeded and additional knowledge was disclosed. Without predetermined interpretation, Baur felt, the scholar could find only unintelligible chaos in history. This admission opened a devastating breach in the original requirement of absolute objectivity, and for Overbeck it was a sign of Baur's great perception and immense superiority over his contemporaries that he did not simply ignore this damaging insight but followed it through to its conclusion.[32]

It would be senseless, according to Baur, for a historian to present himself as somehow able to stand above and beyond the historical process, for he is part of it, colored by the same relativity of time and space that all things display. The very categories he selects for studying the past belong to his own time. Therefore, since

---

[32] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 181.

the historian is ultimately engaged in interpreting the past for the present, he would do well to have a definite attitude toward his era, a perspective that would provide coherence to his efforts. He must be aware of both his own possibilities and his own limitations in order to perform his task in a meaningful fashion.

This characterization of historical research as a problematical activity at best was one to which Overbeck could subscribe wholeheartedly. The historian could never really avoid subjectivity for all of his efforts to be unprejudiced. It was the curse of his profession to have some sort of blindness, and this fact had to be kept in mind. Objective events and subjective presentations invariably flowed in the same river bed no matter how many demands for their separation were made. In view of the uncertainty of historical investigation and the questionable finality of its results, Overbeck felt that skepticism was the only appropriate frame of mind for a historian; it was a limiting agent to his preconceptions. The historian naturally possessed certain suppositions, above all that he can grasp and comprehend the substance of history, but they must be tentative, capable of abandonment if they proved to do violence to their material or to be inadequate under scrutiny. As with all science and knowledge, the value of history was a function not of its methods, which could be dangerous and only self-perpetuating, but of the extent to which it led to insight concerning one's position, operated critically, and furthered the search for truth.[33]

---

[33] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 1, 10-12. Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 112.

Here is the crux of the insurmountable disparity between the two church historians, exemplified in the fact that while Overbeck skillfully maneuvered to evade all pastoral duties, Baur strenuously insisted on his right to serve as preacher in the University church.[34] Baur's methodology, as interpreted by Overbeck, was a ringing declaration of independence, an unequivocal insistence that church history was to be handled with the same absence of bias as all secular history, with no special dispensation for the universal truth of Christianity. Yet, Baur was a self-conscious theologian, totally committed to Protestantism. He was so burdened with ideological committment that he negated and betrayed the potential of his own method. Without qualification or substantiation, Baur presumed history to be God in the process of revelation and the development of self-consciousness, a definition which he originated independent of Hegel and later inserted into Hegelian categories. If God "lived" in history, if history was the spectacle of Providence mediating itself toward an eventual unity, then the historian was not merely concerned with the activities and thoughts of individuals, for these were significant largely only as the ground in which the Divine Idea actualized itself. He had to acknowledge the rationality and continuity with which God endowed history and bear in mind that what now might appear irrational or accidental were, in fact, elements that would fit together harmoniously. Presumably appropriate critical research could determine the place of each segment within the pattern.[35]

---

[34] Hodgson, Formation of Historical Theology, pp. 19-20.

[35] On Baur's dogmatic assumptions, see: Ibid., pp. 90-99, 134-141.

Baur, the objective historian, had preemptorily announced that history had an intelligible goal and that historical human beings were, in reality, little more than marionettes operated by an Absolute Spirit. This was the ambivalence that Overbeck found in all nineteenth century church history: on the one hand it was theoretically its own end, concerned with nothing more than establishing the facts of a case, but on the other hand, it decisively rejected the concept of pure learning because its purpose was to prove the absolute truth of Christianity. Obviously it could not achieve both ends, and the apologetic interest consistently emerged the victor.

Overbeck believed that the undying service of the Enlightenment to humanity was that through its resolute rationalism is withdrew history from the province of religion and opened unnumerable possibilities for men to understand themselves.[36] If man has exclusive rights of ownership to anything in the universe, it is certain that they are to his own past, where he alone lives and acts and where the only voice he hears is a human one. If there is a constant, guiding principle which can be discerned providing cohesion to history, it is that men are always involved in conflicts which are ancient in origin and endless in duration.[37] In the end, Baur had chosen to play with the same stacked deck theologians habitually use: the affirmation that no scholar could write church history without first believing in

---

[36] Overbeckiana, II, pp. 131-132. Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 5, 134-135.

[37] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 14-15, 17.

Christianity. Baur was indeed one of the fathers of critical historical research in his field, but his lack of inner freedom with respect to his subject likewise made him one of the progenitors of crippled "pseudohistory" and "pseudocriticism,"[38] which flitted back and forth between heaven and earth as theological orthodoxy dictated.

He had nevertheless created a magnificent instrument which opened vistas to what Overbeck came to call "profane church history," an understanding of the Christian church as a historical problem unencumbered by dogmas of holiness or special missions and strictly excluding ecclesiastical viewpoints. The objective of profane church history was not intended to be a demonstration of the truth or falsehood of Christianity; such metaphysical chores did not belong within its realm. It was a claim that the church could be studied in a way no different from any other human institution and a denial that the only way to understand a particular state of mind was to share and affirm it. If only a Christian can interpret church history accurately, then, by logical extension, no one can comprehend anything beyond his own culture or even beyond himself. History consequently becomes a collection of self-contained, impenetrable compartments, and, in fact, ceases to exist altogether. Regardless of the claims of Catholicism and Protestantism, there was nothing Overbeck found in church history to suggest it had a miraculous inspiration, requiring special handling. No atrocity and no fatuity which existed in the

---

[38] Overbeck, Das Johannesevangelium: Studien zur Kritik seiner Erforschung, edited by C. A. Bernoulli (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1911), pp. 19-22.

rest of history was absent from its course; no superior quality distinguished it.[39] Profane church history was conceived as an affirmation that dogmatism smothers learning; that hypotheses, while unavoidable and even useful for marking conclusions to inquiry, must be kept in hand and firmly implanted in the reality of available information; that only what was known could help to illuminate what was unknown.[40]

The tragedy of Baur was that he was as incapable as any theologian of properly utilizing his instrument of research or of crossing the threshold into new vistas. He was a prisoner of his occupation. Overbeck recognized the situation and while retaining his debt of gratitude to the Tübingen pioneer, overcame Baur's limitations. As Nietzsche wrote in the introduction to Ecce Homo: "One repays a teacher badly if one always remains a pupil only."[41]

The peculiarity of Overbeck's attitude toward history was that it recalled not so much Baur and Ranke, in whose intellectual lineage he believed himself to be, as Burckhardt. There was no direct influence on Overbeck from this source, and the considerable differences between them ought not to be minimized. Above all, the sweep of Burckhardt's history of civilization and his dark, Calvinistic prognistocations for the twentieth century were foreign to Overbeck.

---

[39] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 19, 265-266.

[40] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, pp. 115-116, 127-128.

[41] Werke, II, p. 1068.

Still, many of the dissimilarities were questions of degree rather than kind. For instance, despite his scorn for the notion that historians were scientists charged with establishing "what actually happened" in the past and his conviction that history was to be selectively interpreted, Burckhardt insisted that bias and overestimation of the importance of the present were the greatest enemies of knowledge and advocated detached meditation as the only method conducive to insight.[42] Overbeck would not have gone as far as Burckhardt's dictum that history was "the record of facts which one age finds remarkable in another," but would have fully agreed with his objections to the specialists who assumed understanding was a function of the amount of data accumulated. For both men the value of studying history was not an intrinsic element but measured by the degree it contributed to the intellectual and spiritual improvement of the historian.

In essentials the two men were agreed. Without any mutual interaction other than that demanded by courtesy, they examined the past with comparable pessimism, skepticism and impartiality, and came to the same set of conclusions: that the course of history betrays no particular message and, therefore, discussions of golden ages, primitive or future, are fruitless; that the answers to the riddles of life suggested by history are individual, not universal; that the only subject of history is man in conflict with himself;

---

[42] For Burckhardt's conception of history, see Force and Freedom, pp. 71-92, 307-327.

his fellows and his environment; that culture is far superior to political or ideological concerns; that the great banes of modern time include theology, the press and public opinion. The most startling point of affinity lay in that area where Burckhardt's uniqueness with regard to his contemporaries has always been most evident: his depiction of the shape of history. Rejecting both the theory of progress, as propounded by Hegelians and positivists, and the cyclical theory, as presented by Nietzsche and Lasaulx, Burckhardt described history as an undulating continuum along which civilizations and institutions were born, grew, blossomed and decayed, not precisely in biological or botanical terms but close enough to merit analogies. Overbeck wrote:

> The movement of history is neither continual degeneration nor continual progress; it manifests itself in the interlacing of the two . . . [A historical object] begins especially strongly and grows until it decays. That is true of every historical form if it will be contemplated historically in a real and earnest fashion . . . History receives movement, whether upwards or downwards, from no force, for it has this movement within itself.[43]

If history seems to reveal nothing but decay and degeneration, it is because historical manifestations necessarily display more strength in their birth than in their subsequent development. The disappearance of a given historical force from the stage does not leave a hole in the scene, for something new will step in. The newborn come from within the dying and build upon them, maintaining continuity:

> No history that is perceptible to us begins in a paradise in which nothing has gone before. Everywhere, whatever

---

[43] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 6.

> appears in history has had something lead the way. Something was always there, the ruins of which lay on the ground when it was seized upon by the new force . . . Whether Graeco-Roman antiquity is something that in every sense belongs to the past is a question which our own present has reason to raise, for antiquity still lives on manifoldly among us; it is prominent with a form still powerful within our lives, namely with the Church.[44]

On the basis of history understood as continuity or duration, Overbeck proceeded to deny the possibility of writing contemporary history, as Treitschke had attempted to do. No historian has the ability to judge what has power and what will survive out of his own time. The most valuable service he could perform would be to write autobiographically, giving full play to subjectivity and indicating the workings of his own time upon himself; the character of the historian would then determine the worth of his book.[45]

The present was not the only era closed to scrutiny in Overbeck's view, for the historian could not claim the totality of the past as his province either. Overbeck quoted Ranke with approbation: "History first begins where monuments become intelligible and credible literary records exist."[46] Beyond this barrier lies Urgeschichte (pre-history), which is related not to chronology in an absolute sense but to the mystery of birth and which remains hidden in its operations, impervious to the instruments and techniques

---

[44] Overbeck, Vorgeschichte und Jugend der mittelalterlichen Scholastik, pp. 5-6.

[45] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 3-4.

[46] Ibid., p. 20. The citation is from the introduction to Ranke's Weltgeschichte.

of historical scholarship. Between these two poles history exists. To study it, the historian must ask questions that lie within the correct limits and be willing to accept the answers which emerge.

VI. CHRISTIANITY AND HISTORY

As a church historian, Overbeck found the problem of the interconnection between history and Christianity a matter of extreme importance, and his perspective on the subject was necessarily reflected in every aspect of his work. He asked rhetorically whether it was not true that Christianity, which above all claimed to be absolute, universal and eternal, possessed the unique quality of contemporaneity in every historical era. Did not Christianity have a position in the world today no different from the one it occupied two thousand years ago? He replied:

> No one who thinks historically can grant that. Whoever thinks so cannot have two thousand years erased from the world as if of no importance. The Christianity that has lived so long can no longer occupy the same position in the world today that it occupied at the beginning, since the events which then lay before it now lie behind it.[1]

If, as theologians of the caliber of Ritschl and Harnack insisted, Christianity has been a historical power, then it must be subject to the same constants that work upon every other historical institution, notably the characteristic of unremitting change, of gradual unwinding to the point of eventual immobility and death. In its primitive state Christianity realized this inescapable axiom and so renounced the world and its history without reservation. It was,

---

[1] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 268-269.

in fact, intended to be proclamation of the imminent end to both. It was supposed to be the herald of the coming of the kingdom of God.

> In truth the modern efforts to make Christianity subject to history can only raise the question whether it is and can be more than a riddle in human history, that is a problem of basically enigmatic nature which places everything in history in question . . . Originally Christianity rejected history for itself and experienced one only against its own primevally expressed will . . . Placing Christianity under the concept of the historical thus admits that it has become historical -- that is, that Christianity is of the world and, as all life, only lived in this world in order to live a full life. Placing it under the category of development places it also under the general scheme of the historical consideration of things in which one speaks of a beginning, a blossoming, and an end, something genuine and real Christianity never acknowledged. Transplanted to the basis of historical contemplation, Christianity is irrevocably enslaved to the concept of mortality or decadence. Truly, on the basis of historical contemplation, the concept of a mythical, golden era for Christianity is less fundamentally destroyed than that of eternal existence. The extreme old age of Christianity is for serious historical contemplation the lethal argument against its immortality. In life there is no old age that is not the forerunner of death. Christianity knew that continually and, in so far as it is living, still does.[2]

Historical analysis is a form of dissection, and, as with all post mortem examinations, presupposes the death of the subject under question. Historically there can be no evidence that Christianity might be eternal; such a representation can only be made from a point of view which has no concept of time or of the sense of youth and age. Historically all that men can say of Christianity is that it is worn out and too old.[3]

---

[2] Ibid., pp. 7-8.

[3] Ibid., pp. 69-71.

Overbeck rejected out of hand the argument that Christianity tamed history by becoming a turning point and thus providing a final orientation for humanity. No scheme of periodization in history can arrogate to itself the adjective "final." Periodization belongs to the category of insoluble problems, and when Christian chronology is advanced as fitting the qualifications for finality, one only becomes conscious of how pitifully inadequate the religion is to confirm such an assertion.[4] Justification was possible only if Christianity had indeed brought about a "new age," but this had not materialized.

> It had originally spoken of a new age only under a prerequisite which had never occurred, that the existing world must perish and make room for a new one. This was a serious expectation for a moment and as such has always reappeared, but only fleetingly. It has never become a fact of historical permanence, which alone could have given the real foundation for a conclusive chronology which corresponded to the facts of reality. It is the world that has prevailed, not the Christian expectation, and so the supposed Christian epoch has continually remained only a dream.[5]

Christianity did not tame history. On the contrary, history spread the pallor of death over Christianity. "History everywhere reaches out to the limits of Christianity. Precisely for that reason history is an abyss into which Christianity has been catapulted entirely against its will."[6]

The appraisal of Christianity, in its original form at any rate, lay beyond the possibilities of historical methodology because

---

[4] Ibid., p. 7.

[5] Ibid., p. 72.

[6] Ibid., p. 7.

Christianity was a fragment not of the past but of the qualified past, Urgeschichte. Overbeck did not introduce this concept publicly until the publication of his article "Über die Anfänge der patristischen Literatur" ("Concerning the Origins of Patristic Literature") which appeared in 1882,[7] virtually at the end of his publishing career. Nevertheless, he thereafter regarded the distinction between the Urgeschichte and the subsequent development of every historical movement or institution of utmost significance,[8] a point that only Nigg among Overbeck's interpreters has stressed with sufficient emphasis. Unfortunately, at the same time, he has done little to clarify Overbeck's use of the term. Nigg has proposed the Urgeschichte might be compared with Goethe's intuitive concept of the Urpflanze, which Goethe variously conceived as either the botanical ancestor of all plant life or a sort of Platonic ideal which existing plants reflect. Nigg has also drawn parallels between Urgeschichte and the supernatural, largely incomprehensible "first-timedness" of the Last Supper, which can be discussed only in symbolic terms.[9] Such images

---

[7] In Historische Zeitschrift, XLVIII (1882), pp. 417-472.

[8] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 23.

[9] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 79. Karl Barth also has dealt with this concept of Overbeck's but has done so largely in theological terms. See, for instance, his essay on Overbeck in Theology and Church, Shorter Writings, 1920-1928, translated by Louise Pettibone Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), especially pp. 58-59 and 62.

only spread a shimmer of mysticism over something Overbeck tried to explicate as concretely as possible. His use of the word may, at times, have strayed dangerously close to the borders of abstruse metaphysics. However, it never crossed, and it remained solidly anchored within a rationalistic framework.

As has already been indicated, the term Urgeschichte referred not to a chronological prehistoric era which existed before the advent of decipherable records but to that period at the beginning of each historical manifestation when energy was being amassed and life was being infused. Thus Christianity and the church experienced their collective Urgeschichte surreptitiously within the mature and brilliant Graeco-Roman culture. Overbeck supposed that when the necessary forces have been assembled and the form of a given entity has become sufficiently defined, it enters into the stream of history, and, in the process of dissipating its energy and exhibiting gradual atrophy, it becomes a subject for historical investigation. The tools of the historian are not adequate for explaining or exploring the creation of life, only for measuring the path to expiration. No man is empowered to say why the birth of a given object was necessary; he can only be assured that death is the inevitable conclusion for it.

Because, by its nature, Urgeschichte has thrown a dark veil over its workings, it is extremely hazardous to approach.

> The problems of Urgeschichte [wrote Overbeck] are in constant danger of being pursued in the light where all cats are gray. They are only open to scholars who are able to inspire the belief that they themselves have the

> ability to move in this light and see with cats' eyes in the dark. Harnack is one for whom this capacity is unconditionally prohibited, for to such a person much is gray also in the light.[10]

Understandably Overbeck was no advocate of Urgeschichte, either as a legitimate area of historical research or an area from which historical models might be drawn. He felt that the greatest service that shcolarship could render to it was to recognize absolutely the line which divided beginnings and origins from history and not to cross over it. The historian could delineate the broad shapes within Urgeschichte and perhaps even sense its depth, but beyond that, he must admit his ignorance. Urgeschichte was a closed unit, its literature and monuments completely intelligible only to itself, despite the opinions of later commentators. If these risks were only grasped with a modicum of comprehension, Overbeck averred, there would not be such a rush of ecstatic historians, theologians and philologists into the field, lumping everything into the undifferentiated general category of the past and eagerly probing after the secrets of the genesis of Christianity.[11]

Overbeck cited the learned discussions of Christian-Socialism and Social-Christianity as a telling example of the dubious results and patent misunderstandings which could issue from the promiscuous scrambling of historical boundaries and overestimation of the possi-

---

[10] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 81. In Christentum und Kultur, p. 20, Bernoulli edited out the reference to Harnack.

[11] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 21-25.

bilities of historical research. Such postulates were nonsense. Original Christianity asserted an exclusiveness which meant that the world over which it would hold control was self-contained; the outside world and its history was rejected without qualification. Socialism, or what would later be designated as such, was intrinsically part of the fabric of original Christianity to the point where it could not be identified as a separate movement at all. Later, when Christianity had become part of world history as church history, Socialism unfolded as an identifiable entity in its own right, shattering the initial unity, generating its own interests, and making the alliance with Christianity appear more and more accidental. Up to the French Revolution the religious basis of Socialist movements was readily acknowledged, but since then the emancipation and secularization of Socialism has proceeded apace. Christian-Socialism may still make its appearance, revealing how much the economic-political strivings of Socialism owed to religion, and may even enjoy a degree of success, in Catholic nations above all; but the hyphen betrayed how little kinship there was with first century Christianity.[12] Christian-Socialism was one more piece of evidence to Overbeck of the bankruptcy of modern Christianity. In entering the world and becoming an arbitrator for social questions, Christianity had had to surrender its claim to the totality of human existence and take its place as merely another cultural force -- one indeed that could be used for various purposes.

---

[12] Ibid., pp. 26-28. Nigg, Franz Overbeck, pp. 83-84

In his own fragmentary discussions of Christian Urgeschichte, produced out of the necessity of differentiating it from his own field of interest, that of the church fathers, Overbeck stayed by his cautionary dicta. At best, he supplied some observations about the nature of original Christianity rather than a concrete definition, believing the high-sounding efforts to capture what Harnack called the "essence of Christianity" by formulas only a scholarly mask for the advancement of personal attitudes and opinions as facts.[13]

Typical of the extent to which he committed himself to a fixed position with regard to this subject are the passages Bernoulli included in Christentum und Kultur:

> Christianity means nothing else than Christ and the belief of his followers in him. It is something supratemporal, not existing in Jesus' lifetime. I think no modern theological investigation of original Christianity has succeeded in proving otherwise. After Jesus' death it withdrew from all historical perception in that Christ's followers became a completely incomprehensible thing shimmering ambiguously between existence and non-existence. Paul first introduced Christianity into the sphere of history . . . Only an illusion can have Christianity beginning with Jesus as a historical person . . . Historical Christianity is that which developed in history and became a historical power in human society there. It is entirely different from the Christianity that modern theologians fancy themselves able to found on the historical person of Jesus, which belongs to the past.[14]

The chief prerequisite for a Christian was "childlike" belief" in Christ.[15]

If this description seemed both severely limited and exces-

---

[13] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 136.

[14] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 28.

[15] Ibid., pp. 48, 64, 263.

sively exclusive, the impression was certainly intentional, serving to point up how little real feeling for the original faith could exist in the modern era. Christianity had deteriorated mightily from its first century of existence and was loaded dwon with the doctrinal and apologetic baggage imposed by two thousand years of accommodation with the world, its history and its culture. Christianity did not exist in a collection of historical and mythological facts, or in dogma concerning Divine love and mercy, the remission of sins and life without death. It existed in an elementary life-view which totally absorbed the believer.[16] The practical expression of this life-view lay in eschatology, "the highest wisdom which Christianity has for us men, mystical as well as rational," a basic truth overlooked by all facile efforts to reconcile Christianity and the world through optimism or emphasis on secular progress.

Modern Christianity left absolutely no room for the Second Coming and thereby announced itself the direct antithesis of the first generation of Christians who placed this expectation at the center of their belief.[17] It was this anticipation of the impending

---

[16] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 93, 111.

[17] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 8, 66. Barth compared Overbeck to the theologian Blumhardt, who likewise based his denial that the modern age was Christian on the proclivity of theology for pushing eschatology into the shadows (Theology and Church, pp. 55-56). As Vischer pointed out in his rebuttal, Blumhardt coupled his criticism with a personal belief in an ever-present Christ, which was hardly the case with Overbeck (Selbstbekenntnisse, p. 54).

end of the world and institution of God's kingdom which gave impetus and urgency to Paul's unremitting missionary activities.[18] This significance of eschatology also led Overbeck to suppose, contrary to the prevailing opinion in theological circles, that the amelioration of the conditions of Roman slaves was not a salutary result of the spread of Christianity but wholly a product of the growing influence of pagan stoicism. Christianity assumed slavery to be a part of the given world order, and, denying reformism the same as any secular activity, it put full e[illegible]preparing individuals for the pending Last Judgme[illegible]

Coupled wi[illegible]ction of the world and vision of the return of C[illegible] these two elements was asceticism, another [illegible]tic. "Early Christianity was a way of thinking [illegible]n the world only through persecution and for that [illegible]e ascetic; that is, despite everything Christianity had asceticism so to speak in its system."[20] The Christian outlook on life was unrelentingly pessimistic. Overbeck variously commented that "the light Christianity spreads over the other world serves less to illuminate it than to reveal the darkness of the temporal world" and that "Christianity was not seriously based on anything other than the unholiness of the world."[21] "World

---

[18] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 57-58.

[19] See his essay "Über das Verhaltnis der alten Kirche zur Sclaverei in römischen Reiche" in Studien zur Geschichte der alten Kirche.

[20] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 32.

[21] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 50, 71.

end of the world and institution of God's kingdom which gave impetus and urgency to Paul's unremitting missionary activities.[18] This significance of eschatology also led Overbeck to suppose, contrary to the prevailing opinion in theological circles, that the amelioration of the conditions of Roman slaves was not a salutary result of the spread of Christianity but wholly a product of the growing influence of pagan stoicism. Christianity assumed slavery to be a part of the given world order, and, denying reformism the same as any secular activity, it put full emphasis on preparing individuals for the pending Last Judgment.[19]

Coupled with Christianity's rejection of the world and vision of the return of Christ and growing out of these two elements was asceticism, another fundamental characteristic. "Early Christianity was a way of thinking which could triumph in the world only through persecution and for that reason had to be ascetic; that is, despite everything Christianity had asceticism so to speak in its system."[20] The Christian outlook on life was unrelentingly pessimistic. Overbeck variously commented that "the light Christianity spreads over the other world serves less to illuminate it than to reveal the darkness of the temporal world" and that "Christianity was not seriously based on anything other than the unholiness of the world."[21] "World

---

[18] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 57-58.

[19] See his essay "Über das Verhaltnis der alten Kirche zur Sclaverei in römischen Reiche" in Studien zur Geschichte der alten Kirche.

[20] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 32.

[21] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 50, 71.

> World denial is the innermost soul of Christianity; the world no longer has any value to it as a conceivable and worthy place for religion. With that is connected the extraordinary poverty of church history in great and pure characteristics. History experiences nothing of the greatest and purest in this area.[22]

The summary of the Christian attitude was found in Matthew 19:12, which, for Overbeck, was the firmest statement of the absolutely unbending character of Christian asceticism:

> For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

The first Christians took the sinfulness of the world as an incentive to rise above it. Asceticism, institutionalized as monasticism, kept alive the essential impulses of Christianity when the church, the religious community which grew out of the evangelical embryo, opened its doors to the heathen masses. The preservation of an ascetic element within Christianity and its valuation above the compromised and debased religion which appealed to the wider populace were the reasons why the failure of Christ to return did not shatter the faith. Asceticism was the continuation of the eschatological belief in a form which countered its refutation by fact with defiance in ideals.[23]

> The ascetic view and conduct of life is, in fact, a metamorphosis of the early Christian belief in the return of Christ in so far as it rests upon the perpetual

---

[22] Ibid., p. 93.

[23] Ibid., pp. 70, 86.

> expectation of this return, continues to view the world as ripe for destruction, and induces the believing to withdraw from the world in order to be prepared for the reappearance of Christ, hourly anticipated. The expectation of the return of Christ had become untenable in its original form, which enlivened the prospect of the destruction of the present form of the world with all manner of Judaic hopes; it changed into the death-thought which according to Irenaeus should always accompany the Christian, into the memento mori whereby the greeting of the Carthusians summarizes more deeply the basic wisdom of Christianity than the modern formula that 'nothing disturbing should force itself between men and their fountainhead.'[24]

Overbeck did not think that the significance of asceticism in maintaining the kernel of faith could be overestimated, particularly once the failure of the world to end cost Christianity its youthful vitality and forced it into world history. Monasticism was more than an expression of philosophical purity: the cloister saved Christianity from degenerating into nothing more than an agency of the state, and it was the source for every great movement or profound creation that the church generated until the Reformation. Although Harnack hailed Luther as the man who liberated humanity from the fetters of asceticism and asserted that the efficacy of Protestantism in proclaiming the Gospel was a result of its rejection of the ascetic ideal, Overbeck considered the Reformation the death knell for for ecclesiastical creativity. When Protestant divines seriously declared asceticism to be irrelevant to Christianity and an ecclesiastical eccentricity of a particular historical period, they put themselves in the absurdly untenable position of concluding that for some fifteen hundred years the religion had been dominated and disfigured by an alien power and that only with Luther did its

---

[24] Ibid., pp. 86-87.

true personality at last become revealed.[25]

This point was one of the several upon which Overbeck faulted Nietzsche's conception of Christianity. Overbeck felt that Nietzsche had committed a serious error in not keeping in mind with any clarity or consistency the difference between original Christianity and the later form embodied by the church; as a result of this confusion, Nietzsche did not appear to regard asceticism as an initial component of the religion but as a later development, occasioned by the influx of pagan converts. He thereby approached perilously the Reformation attitude that asceticism was completely detachable from Christianity with no harm to the understanding of the latter. Nietzsche, the opponent of Christianity, was actually guilty of "hyperprotestantism."[26] Unlike Nietzsche, who anathematized the Germans for snatching Christianity from the destruction slated for it by the Renaissance and revitalizing it through Protestantism,[27] Overbeck felt Protestant theology and its twisted interpretations of Christianity were no more than elaborations upon the original lack of empathy on the part of the German tribes for this religion, final degradations fashioned by "arch heathens" who never had been really converted but only looked upon Christianity as another bit of plunder to have from the Roman Empire.[28] In this context the lack of sensitivity of Protestant

---

[25] Ibid., pp. 83-84. Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 125-126.

[26] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 32-33.

[27] Nietzsche, Werke, II, pp. 1232-1234.

[28] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 101-108.

theologians for the soul of Christianity and even Nietzsche's erroneous conclusions about asceticism became intelligible. In fact, Overbeck found much in Nietzsche's discussion of the nature of Christianity that recalled "certain celebrities of modern theology like Harnack, except that they adore what Nietzsche detests."[29]

Although Overbeck duly noted Nietzsche's opinion that Christianity was the revenge of the "little people," the sick, debased and decadent, against all that was noble and great, he made no use of it in his own works and suggested no agreement with it. Apparently he felt that the concept was far too unscholarly for serious application in historical research. Nietzsche's entire impression of early Christianity grated on Overbeck as being cast too fully in a political mold,[30] and he even found himself speculating whether such a consistent and outspoken opponent of antisemitic fanaticism as his old friend had not allowed this very prejudice to color those last antiChristian polemics.[31]

---

[29] Overbeck, Die neue Rundschau (1906), p. 224. This observation might be taken as incidental evidence that Nietzsche's liberation from Christianity was the product of a long struggle with himself and perhaps was never as clean cut as he wanted to suppose.

[30] Ibid., p. 40.

[31] Ibid., p. 222. Actually, Nietzsche's early condemnation of antisemitism never underwent any sort of revaluation. Der Anti-Christ adopted some of the antisemitic bombast consciously for the sake of irony, in order to point up the fact that all of the qualities the antisemites found so objectionable in the Jews were exemplified not in the mosaic Judaism of the Old Testament but in the Pauline Christianity of the New Testament.

On the other hand, Overbeck called Nietzsche's insight concerning the basal Jewish heritage of Christianity one of his most valuable contributions to the understanding of Christian Urgeschichte and a needed corrective to Schopenhauer's Buddhist categories.[32] "The God of Christianity," wrote Overbeck, "is the God of the Old Testament."[33] When theologians naively separated the Old Testament from the New Testament and relegated the former to mere ancient history, they eviscerated Christianity and undermined its entire foundation. This flaw of the theologians was a falsification of history which led to a characterization of Paul that placed him somewhere between Judaism and paganism when, in actuality, Paul's Christianity, as Nietzsche has stated, was only another form of Judaism. Paul, armed with mosaic law and an idealized Judaism, had set out to convert the world.[34] Even more, this flaw reduced Jesus from being the Godhead to nothing more than a hero of his time, in Carlyle's sense. To be divine, the figure of Jesus had to transcend his immediate era and exist beyond time. He then would become the subject of the entire Bible, and the Old Testament would not be interpreted as a record of what occurred before Jesus' human birth but as a sign of his existence above particular historical events. A genuine God must live

---

[32] Ibid., p. 224. Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 31.

[33] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 266.

[34] Ibid., pp. 61-62.

in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament.[35]

Overbeck not only insisted on the Jewish character of Christianity; he also affirmed that it belonged to antiquity, simultaneously going further than either Nietzsche or the theologians, since both explained Christianity as a replacement or gravedigger for Graeco-Roman culture.

> Christianity in the form in which it has been received by modern people is by no means only a religion; it is at the same time a culture. Graeco-Roman antiquity in the hours in which it felt its end approach, became Christian and, dying, gained the strength to make us its heirs so that at the same time, from the same hands, and as a unitary entity modern people received the culture of antiquity with the Christian religion. It might be said that Christianity is the embalmed form in which antiquity has come down to our time.[36]

Christianity was not a new departure, a contrast to what had gone before, but, as embodied in the church, it was an agent for maintaining the continuity of history, absorbing what it could from its surroundings and transmitting these fragments with only the alterations those required to make pagan usages more palatable. Under these conditions alone, all talk about modern or contemporary Christianity became meaningless. The structure of Christianity belonged to the ancient world; efforts at modernization can disguise this fact but not cancel it. An impassable chasm of two thousand years separates Christianity from the modern world despite theological sophistry.[37]

---

[35] Ibid., pp. 36-38.

[36] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, p. 22.

[37] Cf., Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 138.

In his discussion of Christian Urgeschichte, Overbeck had very little to say about Jesus, a perfectly reasonable neglect in view of the peculiar nature of the available source material, the contradictions that existed between the synoptic Gospels and John and the absence of any literary production on the part of the subject. Early in his career Overbeck concluded that such theological exercises as writing the life of Jesus or advocating restoration of the "Christianity of Christ" were worthless,[38] and he often discussed this point with Nietzsche.[39] Nietzsche's efforts to depict the psychological type of the Redeemer in Der Antichrist, the man who instinctively hated reality, who was incapable of either negating or of resisting, fascinated Overbeck as the "most serious attempt to offer a human characterization of Jesus."[40]

Overbeck clearly agreed with Nietzsche as to the extent of Jesus' serenity, not a quality of being able to control his passions but of lacking them entirely; this was the childlike faith to which Overbeck frequently referred. Nietzsche wrote of it:

---

[38] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 74-79. See also the following book reviews: Ernst Renan, Vie de Jésus, Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 45 (November 7, 1863), columns 1057-1059; David Friedrich Strauss, Das Leben Jesu für das deutsche Volk bearbeitet, Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 19 (May 6, 1865), columns 489-493; Friedrich Schleiermacher, Das Leben Jesu, Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 42 (October 14, 1865), columns 1105-1108; Friedrich Tafel, Das Leben Jesu, Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 31 (July 28, 1866), columns 818-819.

[39] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 42.

[40] Ibid., p. 44.

> Such a faith is not angry, does not reproach, does not resist: It does not bring 'the sword' -- it simply does not foresee how it might one day separate. It does not prove itself either by miracle or by reward and promise, least of all, 'by scripture:' at every moment it is its own miracle, its own reward, its own proof, its own 'kingdom of God.' Nor does this faith formulate itself: it lives, it resists all formulas.[41]

"Can a human figure as passive as Jesus be considered as the founder of anything in the world (in history)?" asked Overbeck. "Is not Christianity a historical edifice to the dimension of which the figure of Jesus has absolutely no relationship?"[42]

Overbeck did not affirm Nietzsche's aphorism that "in truth there was only one Christian and he died on the cross;"[43] he denied that Jesus could be termed Christian at all. The similarities between Jesus and St. Francis, for example, were less remarkable to Overbeck than the differences. St. Francis, the loyal son of the Pope, displayed the peace announced by Christianity far more completely than Christ, and although he exalted and glorified his faith, he did not follow Jesus beyond the existing ideal of Christianity. Jesus was, after all, a man demanding absolute faith in himself, a dictate which required a personality forceful and powerful enough to establish and proclaim standards that would be obeyed. This mission presupposed the possession and use of a type of power unknown to St. Francis, since as a Christian his sole obligation was to meet these standards.

---

[41] Nietzsche, Werke, II, pp. 1193-1194.

[42] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 39.

[43] Nietzsche, Werke, II, p. 1200.

Jesus' demand for absolute belief precluded enjoyment of the psychological results of manifesting the prerequisite belief.[44]

Nietzsche insisted: "Jesus had abolished the very concept of 'guilt.' He had denied any cleavage between God and man; he lived this unity of God and man as his 'glad tidings.'"[45] Here, to Overbeck, was the key to the personality of Christ:

> Christ is the prototype of the religious drive in men to feel positively one with God. Whoever is not able to find the point within himself where, as in every one of us, the drive and capacity slumbers for sublimating ourselves in God, absolutely abandons comprehension of Jesus. For this individual there are always only the alternatives of worshipping Jesus blindly (the theologians cannot and ought not to do that) or considering him a fraudulent fanatic.[46]

It was a completely different matter whether Jesus was actually God, and certainly not one that could be established on the basis of extant knowledge.[47]

A concurrence also existed between Overbeck and Nietzsche in their general evaluation of Paul as the co-founder of the Christian religion and the man who by opening the doors of the church to the pagans started Christianity on the road to betrayal of its first principles. In Overbeck'swords: "It is clear that Christianity took a double running start in order to enter into life, the first in Christ

Christ

---

[44] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 39.

[45] Nietzsche, Werke, II, p. 1203.

[46] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 42.

[47] Overbeckiana, II, p. 130.

and the second in Paul. The faith of Paul, springing to life after the death of Jesus, is no less of a miracle than the faith of Jesus in himself."[48] Paul accomplished this feat by ignoring the original apostles and acting as if he had a direct relationship to Christ's instruction.[49] This stance in no way gave Paul particular claim to be the most authentic interpreter of the body of teaching left behind by his chosen master. In fact, Paul's explanations were ultimately no more than extremely subjective interpolations, revealing that

> For a personality like Paul's a personality like Jesus' must have been completely unintelligible and only enjoyed either his absolute abhorrence or his absolute veneration. Paul felt both for Jesus . . . Jesus was incomprehensible to Paul, and for that reason Jesus seemed to him a positively transcendental being.[50]

Overbeck even gave utterance to the Nietzschean judgment that "all of the beautiful sides of Christianity stem from Jesus, all of the ugly from Paul"[51] This part of his analysis remained incidental, however, and never approached in the slightest degree the vitriolic execrations which Nietzsche heaped upon Paul, the "dysangelist" and "genius in hatred."[52] After all, Overbeck was not at war with Christianity.

The great value of Paul to Overbeck was as evidence of the way

---

[48] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 62.

[49] Ibid., p. 63.

[50] Ibid., p. 55.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Nietzsche, Werke, II, pp. 1203-1204.

in which a figure like Jesus could be dealt with by a cultivated Jew of the first century and as the mainspring for the expansive energies of Christianity. As a guideline for theology in the modern time, on the other hand, the Pauline conceptions were useless. We were incapable of entering into Paul's mentality which apprehended the world and its history wholly in terms of religion. For us religion was only one element among many in the philosophic spectrum.[53]

Luther himself had misread Paul; Luther's destruction of the ascetic ideal had been a fatal mistake for Christianity, but by no means his only one. Regardless of what Luther believed, Paul did not teach either the unrelenting sinfulness of man or justification by faith. Rather, as a member of the Christian community Paul envisioned himself raised above all sin, to the point that weakness would no longer be felt as a product of sin and suffering need no longer be explained as punishment for it. Elevation to grace through conversion allowed Paul to compare his life, no matter its deficiencies, to that of Jesus. Paul's Christianness was something intensely personal, unrelated and opposed to both the world and its political institutions. Luther's Christianity was completely bound up with the political upheavals of his time, and Paul for him became chiefly a weapon with which to break the power of the Catholic church.[54]

Because of his conviction that the history of the church fathers was actually a literary history, Overbeck was particularly

---

[53] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 55-56.

[54] Ibid., pp. 59-60.

occupied with the literature of Christian Urgeschichte[55] -- or, more accurately, Christian Urliteratur (pre-literature), for he contended that the literary productions of the time of genesis were self-contained, enigmatic expressions in no way related to the universality, intelligibility, and forms of what eventually came to be classified as church literature.

> Whoever speaks of early Christian literature up to Eusebius presupposes only a completely barbaric concept of literature which conceives in this classification nothing more than the raw and undifferentiated mass of all that a greater or lesser human society recorded in writing. . . . The history of ecclesiastical literature can be written only from the moment when . . . the so-named historical quantity has had a continuous historical development which admits of estimation. If this is recognized, the totality that presents itself as literature of early Christian antiquity immediately separates into two complexes, between which a historical connection does not immediately exist: a history of Christian Urliteratur, which declined early, and a subsequent history of ecclesiastical literature, which developed continuously with the old church itself. The boundaries between the two periods emerge from the diversity of the relationships in which the Christian literature of two so different periods stood to the general, profane world literature which surrounded them. The Christian Urliteratur relied completely upon itself, at least completely separated from the developmental conditions which were created in the literature of the time under the Greeks and Romans, while the real literature of the later church essentially followed them in its forms.[56]

The most impressive evidence for the existence of the impassable chasm between these two eras of literature was supplied by Christianity itself, for in establishing its canon the church admitted

---

[55] Overbeck, Historische Zeitschrift, XLVIII, pp. 417-420.

[56] Overbeck, Johannesevangelium, pp. 493-494.

its inability to understand its first writings and set them in a totally different world under the authorship of the Holy Ghost.[57] The act of canonization simultaneously announced the end of those forces which had sustained Christian Urliteratur and the loss of pure faith. It was a final way station, two or three decades after the midpoint of the second century, on the passage of Christianity from Urgeschichte to history. It was also contemporaneous with the work of Clement of Alexandria who, by about 200 A.D., had evolved the characteristics of future ecclesiastical literature, directed at an ideal public and intended for all men at all time.[58]

As was the case in his treatment of Urgeschichte itself, Overbeck did not intend to provide at any point in his discussions of Urliteratur an exhaustive analysis of the field; he did not even explain its origins or propose to catalogue its manifestations. He wished only to illuminate it sufficiently that the depth and difficulties involved in its study might be discerned. By establishing the general character of Urliteratur and distinguishing it from true literature, he could devise a criterion by which he could delimit the area of patristic writings and point up the errors thus far committed by theologians in their arbitrary interpretations of both early Christianity and the church fathers. Beyond these concrete goals he fully respected the inviolability of the darkness in which

---

[57] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 24, and Overbeck, Historische Zeitschrift, XLVIII, pp. 426-428.

[58] Overbeck, Historische Zeitschrift, XLVIII, pp. 437-438, 454, 469-470.

Urliteratur had operated.[59] The key to the sort of categorization required for determining what lay within the realm of Urliteratur was not chronology or even content but literary form. Thus literary history became in reality the history of successive forms within a literature.

According to Martin Tetz, Overbeck anticipated the emphasis he would later place on form in his reworking of de Wette and first introduced the concept two years later in his Universitätsprogramm concerning the "pseudo-justinian" letter to Diogenes. Overbeck later commented that only the theologian Theodor Zahn recognized that the issue at stake was not whether the document in question was a genuine product of early Christianity or a later forgery but the method by which such a proof might be made. The form of the "pseudo-justinian" letter alone, in Overbeck's estimation, placed the work no earlier than the fourth century. It was necessary to clarify the concept of "form-history" before its significance for the study of church history could be generally recognized. Accordingly, the terminology was sharpened in the second version of his 1872 study, which appeared in Studien zur Geschichte der alten Kirche in 1875, and was subsequently elaborated until it schieved its fullest articulation in his 1882 article on patristic literature. It is only in its most mature development that Overbeck's use of "form-history" will be discussed here.

---

[59] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, pp. 86-87.

When Tetz concludes that the kernel of Overbeck's approach lay in the assumption that a division exists between form and content and that any connection between them is accidental, he has overstated his case.[60] Actually when writing about true literature, Overbeck conceived of a unity between the two elements wherein form, that which supplied comprehensible expression and a general appeal to the thoughts embodied within it, was the master. As the literature evolved and the nature of the content changed, the form had to become elastic enough to accommodate it. At the inception of a literary genre, when the content is liable to have its most limited scope and appeal, its form must be strongest in order to secure it the widest possible audience.[61]

On the basis of the elements suggested by this line of argumentation, Overbeck concluded that the New Testament, the sole remaining fragments of a century and a half of Christian Urliteratur, was not the first level of what later became church literature and, in fact, was not a literature at all in the proper sense of the word. When the early Christians withdrew from the world, they also withdrew from the world's literature, dominated at that time by the profane, Graeco-Roman models. Abjuring any pretense to universality, Christianity expressed itself in the nonliterary, tribal dialect of Aramaic, later shifting to a Hellenized Hebrew which was equally a nonliterary

---

[60] Tetz, Theologische Zeitschrift, XVIII:6, pp. 415-417.

[61] Overbeck, Johannesevangelium, pp. 492, 494, 496, and Overbeck, Historische Zeitschrift, XLVIII, p. 429.

language.[62] Speaking the tongue of its people, Christian Urliteratur expressed directly the beliefs it shared with its readers in terms that had immediate relevance, but, because of carelessness about literary forms, it was obscure to anyone who stood at a temporal or spatial distance from it. The eventual result was canon, the embalmment of these works and the admission that they could no longer be interpreted with understanding.[63] Contrary to the conditions which existed in actual literature, Christian Urliteratur rejected form to the point of submerging the identity of the author totally under the religious need which produced the works. Even John, the only Gospel in which the author appears as an artist rather than a mere mouthpiece, belonged to the tradition of anonymity, although nearer borders where Urliteratur and Urgeschichte ended.[64] Finally, Overbeck made the curious observation that the New Testament contained only forms which either had no literary essence -- such as letters -- or did not survive

---

[62] Overbeck, Johannesevangelium, pp. 492-494.

[63] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 23-24. Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 106.

[64] Overbeckiana, II, pp. 130-131. Overbeck, Johannesevangelium, pp. 496-498. Rejecting the traditional theological equation of the fourth evangelist with the apostle John and even Baur's assumption that the evangelist identified himself not with the person of the apostle but with John's cause, Overbeck proposed that the author chose the name as a parallel to John the Baptist. As the Baptist was witness to the Logos before the fulfillment of its worldly epiphany, the fourth evangelist was an ideal John who performed the same function after the Logos has left the earth. (Johannesevangelium, pp. 409-433) The entry of the author of the Gospel of Luke into his own prologue was notable to Overbeck as the first glimmer of embryonic literature but had no real connection with the text that followed. (Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 92)

to pass into Christianity's historical epoch.[65] Since this conclusion is the crux of Overbeck's argument on the nature of the New Testament, it is worthy of closer attention.

Epistolary documents constitute a considerable part of the New Testament, but are a type of written record which is formless and common to all periods of history, an accidental emanation of the desire by two men to communicate with one another when distance prevents the expression of thoughts verbally. As a surrogate for speech, the letter lacks an elemental requirement for literature, the quality of being directed at an undifferentiated public in whom an audience had to be found. The information contained in a letter, assuming it is a genuine specimen and not an artistic invention, is intended for a specific and limited audience and may later have a certain historical interest, but scarcely a literary one.[66]

Overbeck did find in the other three characteristic forms of the New Testament -- Gospels, Acts of the Apostles and the Apocalypse -- efforts to imbue Christianity with a literature created out of its own substance for its own purposes and unconnected with the surrounding world. Of course, with the exception of the Gospels, there was nothing novel about these forms, but their purpose was strictly religious.[67] Moreover, the endeavor to make a Christian literature from these forms

---

[65] Overbeck, Historische Zeitschrift, XLVIII, p. 428.

[66] Ibid., pp. 429-431.

[67] Ibid., p. 443.

proved abortive and after a certain point in the development of the church it was no longer possible to employ these forms further except in an illegitimate and thoroughly unacceptable way.[68]

There was a feeling among nineteenth century theologians that the writing of church history began with the Gospels and Acts, but Overbeck considered this attitude completely untenable. The early Christians conceived of themselves as belonging to a sort of eternal community for which past and present were coexistent and future did not exist. The production of historical literature required a consciousness of change and chronology of a past which could be contrasted to the present; if there were traces of the attitude already in Luke due to the failure of the Second Coming, there was still no intention to compose a church history and little concept of time.[69]

John, the gospel Overbeck found the most intriguing because of its ambivalent position between literature and nonliterature, was in many respects the most unhistorical of all. John used the information offered in the synoptic Gospels not in order to supplement it but to go in a new, even contradictory, direction. The fourth evangelist created his own chronology of scenes and used them largely as sets to give Jesus the opportunity to speak, never resolving the events afterward. The brief, poetic parables by which the synoptic

---

[68] Ibid., p. 432.

[69] Overbeck, Über die Anfänge der Kirchengeschichtsschreibung (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1965) (a reproduction of the 1892 edition), pp. 14-17, and Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 78-80.

Jesus spoke to the multitudes concerning the kingdom of God were transfigured by the fourth evangelist into long, obscure confessions of a supernatural consciousness which perplexed their audiences. This Gospel depicted figures moving through a private conceptual world which had only the remotest association with the realities of human life. The author of the fourth Gospel was comparable to a poet who covered the narrative he adopted from his predecessors with the private world of a vision in which men and objects swirled in a world without time or space, serving only to mirror the existence of an alien force in their midst. Whatever this work might be, it was not history. The author had no desire to provide a lucid account of a particular set of occurrences but to convince his readers that Jesus was the Son of God, offering a new life through slavation.[70]

The themes of the Gospels and Acts were never again taken up after the institution of canon and although the church eventually decided that Acts could be considered as history, it was only under the proviso that the book would not be compared with any other historical writing.[71] The actual father of church history was Eusebius, who sensed he had embarked on a new field and was uncertain as to the direction he should take since all his sources were unhistorical and fragmentary. In so far as Eusebius actually knew that his obligation was to present church history as a piece of world history, Overbeck

---

[70] Overbeck, Johannesevangelium, pp. 248, 278-344.

[71] Overbeck, Historische Zeitschrift, XLVIII, p. 433, and Overbeck, Anfänge der Kirchengeschichtsschreibung, p. 14, footnote 17.

was on his side. Eusebius was the first to go beyond the chronologies of Christian apologetics, which aimed at proving the antiquity of their religion bymmaking the Old Testament tradition older than that of other peoples, and to parallel the old concerns with dynasties, wars and the deeds of illustrious men with a narrative of their ecclesiastical equivalents: bishops, persecutions and teachers.[72] It was unfortunate, in Overbeck's opinion, that Eusebius' apologetic interest of establishing the uniqueness of the Christians among all other peoples was the side of his work that dominated later church history, tending to isolate it among the rest of institutional history.[73]

The existence of writings from the first and second centuries of Christianity which had not been incorporated into canon but which were known to Eusebius, the apocalyptic Shepherd of Hermas , for example, or the works by Papias of Hierapolis and by Hegesippus, was not construed by Overbeck as a meaningful refutation of his position. Such writings were not examples of an early patristic literature but additional specimens of Christian Urliteratur, easily subsumed in the four general categories that Overbeck proposed. The New Testament scarcely exhausted Christian Urliteratur; rather, it preserved some of the best instances of the type, the most distinguished remnants.[74]

The source of patristic literature was to be sought in the progressive compromises that the world forced upon Christianity rather

---

[72] Overbeck, Anfänge der Kirchengeschichtsschreibung, pp. 22-33.

[73] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, pp. 122-125. Overbeckiana, II, pp. 164-167.

[74] Overbeck, Historische Zeitschrift, XLVIII, pp. 435-442.

than in the nonliterature of the religion itself. The powerful opposition of the Roman state to Christianity forced the early Christians, against their will and with tremendous reservations, into the composition of apologetics, intended to represent the good points of the faith to the heathen public and to secure ultimate toleration. In order to appeal to the outsiders the church fathers adopted the forms of the prevailing Graeco-Roman literature and became writers against their will. The church authors were completely aware that they were doing something which was fundamentally wrong and antithetic to Christianity, employing a form that was totally inadequate for the expression of its content. However, since the religious content had no particular significance for its intended public, only the form could provide the works with authority, although the form was used without artistry on purpose and even concealed as much as it revealed.

The forerunners of patristic literature proceeded from the apologetic appeals originated under the reigns of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, the adoption of a pagan style to speak to a pagan audience, to attacks on heretics in the last quarter of the century, the absorption of this style as a weapon to combat internal as well as external enemies. To this point the nascent literature could exist along side the petrifying Urliteratur. Once canon had marked the passage of Urliteratur, patristic literature could take the final step of asserting the profane form as permissible in internal church communication for even noncombative purposes.

The Stromateis of Clement of Alexandria, for all of its planlessness and clever disguise of the Christian secrets before the

defiling eyes of the uninitiate, was to Overbeck the first expression of a mature world literature. It was a declaration that either the Christians had become half pagan or else the church had somehow absorbed heathenism. It also opened wide the possibility of Christianity being lost completely in an alien world. That this calamity did not occur was due, above all, to the protection of canon, which set a norm against which all Christian literature had to be measured and which assured the inclusion of something of early Christianity in all subsequent writings.[75]

The early ecclesiastical writers spoke and were silent at the same time, using human speech only half way in an effort to mask the secrets necessity forced them to betray; the later one, men such as Jerome or Augustine, pretended only to be interpreters of Scriptures and defenders of tradition, handing down what they had learned. "In short, ecclesiastical literature, so far as it developed under the sanction of the church, is organized dishonesty and ambiguity."[76]

Overbeck assumed that in its inception a given book coincided directly with its author, securing its efficacy from the closed unity that existed between creation and creator: for the reader, the author did not seem to be an individual along side his writing but, so to speak, lived and acted only through his work. In the course of time the book leaves its 'prehistorical' era and becomes an object for

---

[75] Ibid., pp. 447-470.

[76] Overbeck, Johannesevangelium, pp. 494-495.

study by literary history, a certain sign that its original power and effectiveness is ebbing. The author, who was once a living entity within his work, vanishes, leaving the book as an independent agent, and, for the historian, as the sole means by which information about the author might be gathered. What was once contemporary and alive becomes, through the medium of literary history, past and dead, placed upon the dissection table in order to attempt to discover what used to make it function.[77]

> The book ceased to be a closed, organic unity of author and product in this state since it was of importance historically. It acted separately from its author, but at the same time a process is begun at the inevitable end of which it will have ceased to act altogether. Once it was understood through itself as the living word of its author, and its author was not to be cited outside of it. Now, however, no citations of the author which have become desirable restore the former understanding. . . . If it has really gone so far with a literature that it lives only in books, as is the case with Urliteratur above all, then its efficacy is gone. It belongs only to history, no longer to life, and it can be called back into life only in illusory fashion. For that reason every Introduction to the New Testament is practically hopeless.[78]

A book, Overbeck pointed out, is written for its immediate public and not for its later interpreter, a point the interpreter is generally the first to forget. The most interpreted book is not the best understood but the most controversial, the darkest of all.[79] For this reason biblical exegesis tended to strike Overbeck as the horrendous outpouring of profound ignorance.

Overbeck's own attitude toward Christianity in its original

---

[77] Overbeckiana, II, pp. 90-91.

[78] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 22-23.

[79] Ibid., p. 75.

form is, of course, only peripheral to his discussion of Christian Urgeschichte and Urliteratur, an irrelevance assured by his historical method. This attitude does have a certain value, on the other hand, as background for his arguments concerning the historical atrophy of Christianity, a condition which accelerated to such an extent after the Reformation; the destruction of faith by the scientific researches of theologians; and the monstrosity of "modern" Christianity, a grotesque effort to put rouge on the near-dead and induce a semblance of health. Thus it is worth a brief consideration at this point.

Overbeck's intellectual predilections, above all his agnosticism, the ability to admit man does not know all that he might wish, effectively placed him somewhere between paganism and Christianity. It might well be that in practical terms his agnosticism amounted to atheism, in the sense of the absolute isolation of the individual and complete dependence on his own capabilities. As a dogmatically asserted ideology, however, atheism was not acceptable to Overbeck.[80]

The radical stance of his "spiritual testament," which identified religion with myth and superstition was not the result of a lifelong development to extreme positions or a variety of intellectual hardening of the arteries. It was present at least as early as the first edition of Christlichkeit. In a letter Overbeck wrote to the Zurich theologian Alois Emanuel Biedermann on October 30, 1873, part of a conversation in which Overbeck tried fruitlessly, as he so often did, to clarify his position with regard to theology and Chris-

---

[80] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 265; cf., Schindler, Barth und Overbeck, p. 34.

tianity while adequately dealing with all facets of the problem, he observed that reason found no real distinction between belief and superstition.[81] "Mankind has already made enough sacrifice to eternity," he wrote elsewhere.[82] These were the sentiments of a humanist, a man who considered knowledge as one of the most powerful instruments for peace among men, far more important than all churches.[83]

Still, as Nigg pointed out in contrasting Overbeck with Ludwig Feuerbach, Overbeck did not much concern himself with the abstraction of general religion but confined his interest to the concreteness of Christianity;[84] it was here that his broad lack of religious sympathies took their actual shape. In 1905, two months before his death, he wrote:

> In my Programm Concerning the View of the Dispute Between Peter and Paul in Antioch According to the Church Fathers[85] I called theologians 'the half way opponents of the church's faith which the church continually had in its own womb.' However, wherever there is a half, sooner or later a whole appears of necessity. Theology must also learn that. I do not believe that I am the first total opponent of the church's faith which it has produced, but I certainly know that I am not the last -- or, rather, I know the one no less than the other. I am neither the first nor the last.[86]

---

[81] Paul Burckhardt, "Aus der Korrespondenz von A. E. Biedermann" in Aus fünf Jahrhunderten schweizerischer Kirchengeschichte (Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1936), p. 346. This article includes the whole of the correspondence of the two men, (pp. 337-352).

[82] Overbeckiana, II, p. 133.

[83] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 292.

[84] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, pp. 133-134.

[85] Über die Auffassung des Streits des Paulus mit Petrus in Antiochen bei den Kirchenvätern (Basel: C. Schultze, 1877).

[86] Overbeck, Selbstbekenntnisse, p. 159.

In his infrequent unguarded moments Overbeck even let slip musings concerning the possibility that theologians, those parasites and cultural philistines, might after all have a positive role to perform in the education of mankind:

> Admittedly, I do not like theology, but I am no more its fanatic opponent than that of any other cause. Like anything else that exists theology could or has been good for something. Why not, for instance, for securing the boundaries of humanity, for our final and radical liberation from all deistic demonism, from all transcendental metaphysics.[87]

The pretensions of Christianity to being something superhuman and extraordinary could not be taken seriously; it did not bring either ultimate salvation or knowledge.

> What is eternal in us was in us always and did not become part of our life supplementally in a historical moment. . . . The world is a unity of heaven and hell. But we know that without Christianity and for a long time because we knew it out of ourselves. And therein exists the major offense of Christianity against us men: It wants to have us impaled on a fact upon which we have been impaled for a long time and thinks with that in a curious way to save us.[88]

Whenever, hesitantly, Overbeck approached Christianity he found himself repelled by its fanaticism, its fantasies, its self-deception. Although it had correctly identified the ascetic drive as a deeply ingrained human characteristic, one essential to creativity in general, it had stressed this attribute to the exclusion of all others, ignoring the fact that the drive for pleasure had equal claims on life.[89] This sort of artificial cracking of dualisms to liberate

---

[87] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 291-292.

[88] Ibid., pp. 73, 65.

[89] Ibid., pp. 33-34.

one term at the expense of the other created imbalance and artificial simplicity; it was therefore painful for Overbeck. There were other objections to Christianity. He could not buy the proposition sometimes advanced by clergymen that religion was the only sound foundation or the only legitimate source for the higher emotions of man.[90] Christianity demanded an absolute and unequivocal faith in itself, but we know far too much about the world to be able to fall into this childlike belief in what was promised.[91] Overbeck could sometimes be exceedingly caustic in elucidating the failures of Christianity, moving his commentary near the edge of ridicule:

> Christianity undertook the theodicy of the Old Testament God in that it wanted to convince the world God was not to be feared -- that which the Old Testament considered as established from the beginning on -- but ought to be loved. Christianity woefully failed in this undertaking. It has not succeeded up to the present day in convincing the world that matters stood that way with respect to God.[92]

Yet, for all of this, he could be oddly tolerant and even sympathetic toward this fading movement to a god he did not recognize. One of his aphorisms observed:

> Christianity wants to help us men and does not deserve our hatred if it does not have the faculty to do so. Without doubt it does not have this ability, and that is only because it refers us in all seriousness to last things which are beyond us and with that is only the wisdom of death.[93]

---

[90] Ibid., p. 29.

[91] Ibid., pp. 64, 279.

[92] Ibid., pp. 64-65.

[93] Ibid., p. 279.

Christianity, after all, never alleged to have its power and influence in this world; only the theologians have advanced that claim. It was therefore theology that he combatted, not Christianity. Indeed, in his careful adjudication of the credentials of those who would pass themselves off as Christians and his stern maintenance of the inflexible standard for the award of this name, he almost assumed the role that Karl Barth would have him play of the impartial and incorruptible doorman who refused the hypocritical, the thoughtless, and the prisoners of dogma passage beyond the threshold. Overbeck certainly fit this part better than that of a crusader, whose passion it was to liberate culture from the carcass of religion. A crusader must be driven by implacable hatred of that which he would vanquish, but Overbeck lacked real detestation of either Christianity or religion in general, a quality which Nietzsche wore on his sleeve. Overbeck's ambition was no more than to provide an accurate chronicle of finis Christianismi.[94] Actually, this goal could have been only hindered by contempt for the subject under surveillance.

Nowhere did Overbeck provide a systematic exposition of his basic attitudes toward the original tenets and forms of Christianity. In a sense, since this entity passed from existence after less than two centuries and can never be revived, such a discussion was irrelevant. Overbeck recorded only random thoughts on the topic over the course of his life, never bothering to bring them together and reconcile inconsistencies. To a man of reason and unhurried meditation

---

[94] See, for instance, ibid., p. 289.

the phenomenon of religious faith must be evaluated as pure ignorance or an unknown, intangible, perhaps even sublime quality of the human spirit. Overbeck vacillated between these two conclusions, while holding himself personally aloof, and so he possessed a certain reverence toward Christianity as well as being completely conscious of its drawbacks.

He respected pietism in his writings, apparently considering it close to the faith of the early Christians and the antithesis of the dogmatic orthodoxy which shaped "modern" Christianity. Pietism fulfilled the requirement he imposed on any philosophy: it worked through the life of its host.[95] This fact suggested the proposition that Overbeck, like Nietzsche, held the sliver of a possibility that Christianity could still be an operative force in the lives of certain individuals, and it is true that he was impressed by one product of modern theology, Robert Kübel's anonymous Christlichen Bedenken über modernes christliches Wesen (Christian Meditations Concerning the Essence of Modern Christianity),[96] which he felt contained insights and an expression of faith which even a nonbeliever could accept.[97]

In the introduction of Studien zur Geschichte der alten Kirche he commented in the process of attempting to clarify the standpoint from which he worked: "Christianity is a much too sublime thing

---

[95] See above, pp. 95-96 and Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 274-275.

[96] Gütersloh: 1888.

[97] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, footnote, p. 174. Nigg, Franz Overbeck, pp. 56-57.

to be so easily permitted to individuals in a world entirely alien to it without further identifying it," adding that this obligation required finding the correct position on the subject and being able to preserve composure in an era when the power and innocence of former beliefs are dissolving.[98]

It is clear that, in contrast to the Enlightenment thinkers, Overbeck did not consider the effect of Christianity upon the world a retrograde one but of positive worth, setting a high standard to be met by whatever succeeds it. He found the sum of what even so formidable a critical theologian as Strauss had to say about such subjects as the state, war, penal authority and the proletariat infinitely inferior to statements by Augustine, who was more profound, more human, more true.[99] He added:

> Today when people so openly and abruptly separate, when social classes threaten to close themselves off only too hostilely against one another, and when even individuals sustain a precarious indifference toward all society that is not nakedly based upon lower interests, it is still of inestimable value that at least the name of Christian hovers over this whole calamitous period as a sort of categorical imperative, condemning it.[100]

A closer examination of Overbeck's judgment on modern culture will be provided below, but this excerpt should suffice to indicate the extent to which he felt modern civilization had no real reason either to condemn Christianity or to feel superior to it. Nevertheless,

---

[98] P. vii.

[99] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, p. 115.

[100] Ibid., pp. 118-119.

his respect before the elemental impulses of Christianity must not be expanded beyond its obvious limits, as Barth has done, until Overbeck becomes a crypto-Christian, an unknowing participant in the religion with which he felt no connection.[101] He looked upon the almost desperate compulsion of theologians to kidnap all prominent men for Christianity no matter the virulence of the victims' antireligious fulminations as an at once amusing and sad indication of how bankrupt and void the old faith had become.[102]

Peter Gast, in a letter to Overbeck, once summarized the difference he perceived between his two teachers with regard to Christianity, indicating that Overbeck was by far the more insidiously destructive: "Nietzsche fights directly against Christianity thereby unintentionally becoming a protector of it. It is given into your hands to make Christianity impossible with time -- without doing it harm, without stimulating it to reaction -- for you draw up the protocol of its past."[103] There was a good deal of truth in this, except that Overbeck did not picture himself as causing an event but as describing one already under way. As usual, Overbeck's own description was more precise:

> It is best that we let Christianity softly expire. Of what value is the historical contemplation of things if it cannot offer us this service? . . . Carelessness with Christianity exposes us to a double danger: either our

---

[101] Barth, Theology and Church, pp. 64-65.

[102] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 58.

[103] September 25, 1883. Overbeckiana, I, p. 140.

relationship to it degenerates to arid routine or we enter into a rash war of extermination with it. Both are to be avoided. Christianity must be given an end that is more worthy of it and less pernicious to us.[104]

---

[104] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 68-69.

VII. CHRISTIANITY AND THEOLOGY

In his inaugural lecture at Basel, which he delivered on June 7, 1870, Overbeck spoke about the origins and legitimacy of a research into the Old Testament and early Christianity that rested on a historical basis alone, obliged to no other presuppositions. Rejecting the assertion often made by the orthodox that this position was no more than a passing arbitrariness which had gripped a handful of theologians, he argued that in every era the church had possessed an embryonic historical consciousness, even if it amounted to no more than a sad awareness that the primordial simplicity of the faith had somehow become corrupted with the passage of time.[1]

Biblical interpretation, which fairly stagnated after the time of Jerome, revived during the Reformation, although even this breakthrough could not properly harmonize the religious and scholarly tendencies of its theology;[2] Baur was the first to escape the limitations of both the dogmatism of post Reformation orthodoxy and the naturalistic explanations of eighteenth century rationalism by asking the correct question concerning church history -- not whether

---

[1] Overbeck, Über Entstehung und Recht einer rein historischen Betrachtung der neutestamentlichen Schriften in der Theologie (Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1871), pp. 3-5.

[2] Ibid., pp. 14, 17.

it is miraculous or whether it is reasonable, but what it is in general.[3] Thus, Overbeck concluded, the line has been broken in the sense that the historical-critical approach put the problem of Christianity on a basis unknown to the Reformation; for the modern theologian, unlike his sixteenth century counterpart, Christianity is part of the past. Under these new conditions and armed with the insights that historical research offered, it became the obligation of modern theology to achieve what the Reformation could not and "serving neither purely religious nor purely scholarly interests . . . to create inner harmony between our belief and our learned consciousness."[4]

Considering the general aversion to theology and the erosion of religious inclinations that Overbeck's studies at Leipzig and Gottingen had produced, it is difficult to say to what extent this description of theology as a mediator between faith and reason actually reflected his attitude at the time and to what extent it was intentionally designed for reception by the liberal sponsors of his professorship. If in 1870 he did assume that belief could be reconciled with learning, his conversations with Nietzsche brought a complete reversal of his attitude soon afterward. In the opening pages of Christlichkeit, three years later, he declared:

> Nowadays people hear it often asserted that Christianity has an 'inclination toward learning' . . . If Christianity is defined as that which it is originally and above all

---

[3] Ibid., pp. 22-25.

[4] Ibid., pp. 30-32.

> was exclusively, as a religion, nothing can be more false than the cited sentence. On the contrary, so defined, Christianity like every religion has the most unequivocal aversion for knowledge. Like every religion, for the antagonism between faith and reason is eternal and irreconcilable.[5]

With this assertion that the elemental antagonism which has always plagued Christian thinkers was by its very nature indelible and insoluble Overbeck established the position he would assume henceforth in his meditations.

A theologian who offhandedly insists that religion has nothing to fear from reason must be referring to a religion that is firmly implanted in this world. A genuine transcendental faith, as Christianity was in its first stage, does not even recognize the existence of reason or knowledge, only absolute belief. When a theologian argues that faith can coexist with reason, so long as the latter remains confined within certain limits and does not pass judgment on the core of doctrine, he has missed the point entirely. Belief remains strong and retains efficacy only so long as it understands its own essence and thus holds reason at such a distance that no attacks from this quarter become possible. When belief becomes feeble and begins to lose faith in itself, it calls upon reason for assistance, a futile, self-defeating move since reason cannot be reconciled to a mere role as an auxiliary and must always remain something alien within any religion. Given a point of entrance, it floods in from all sides, eventually rendering belief superfluous.[6]

---

[5] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, p. 22.

[6] Ibid., pp. 23-24. Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 76. Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 5, 137.

The destruction need not be the result of a frontal attack. It can emerge just as irreversibly from a desire to explain the conglomerate of realities which have been gathered beneath the name of Christianity -- for example, the rather ludicrous attempts by theologians to explicate why divine miracles somehow took place two millenia ago in a remote corner of the Roman Empire but never again. The concept of miracles when presented under the aegis of faith might be able to bring people into the church, but the same concept when approached rationally can only alienate potential converts.[7] Christianity is not a collection of independent tenets which may be sorted through periodically and accepted or rejected as occasion demands. It is a unity not open to amendment. If the account of the creation provided by Genesis is to be replaced by Darwin, it is only a matter of time before the biblical account of the Resurrection must also be discarded as unscientific. The authority of canon rests on the equal reputation of all of its parts as the literal word of God. If the discoveries of history or natural science cast the least shadow of doubt on the authenticity of any of its portions, then no portion can be immune from revision and no limits exist as to how extreme revision can be.[8]

Reason can only point out the discrepancies that are totally irrelevant for faith but impossible for logic; it can decompose a

---

[7] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 25, 37, 52-53.

[8] Ibid., pp. 37-39.

religion but not create one.[9] So long as a religion can regenerate itself and evolve as a life force rather than as a dogma it is vital, but once this power has disappeared, nothing can restore it to its former condition.

> A religion can be indifferent towards its possession of myths only so long as its power to create myths is alive -- that is, so long as the miraculous powers which produce its myths still continue to work in it. These powers have been lost a long time in the Christian world, as is well known, fundamentally since the existence of a Christian theology. Because, even earlier, Christian myth entered into the stage of a stiff tradition, the historical interpretations of it, above all its canonic records, were exercised early within the Christian community. Still, the old church was free from the superstition that a holy document could be preserved in its religious authority by application of historical interpretation, and it found in allegorical interpretation a kind of substitute for the dead myth. On the other hand, our present day theology cannot conceive of any interpretation of the Christian religious books other than the historical and indulges in the almost incomprehensible illusion that it can again become certain about Christianity by the historical method, If that succeeds, however, it will produce at best an academic religion, that is, nothing that can seriously be compared with a real religion.[10]

It was understandable, possibly inevitable, that when the apocalyptic destiny of the world was not fulfilled as anticipated, Christianity would naturally seek accommodation with the world. To combat the metaphysics which Gnosticism injected into Christianity, the young church was obliged to create a theology for the purpose of establishing the genuine standards of the faith and to place a cer-

---

[9] Ibid., p. 41. Overbeckiana, II, p. 133. Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 13.

[10] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 35-36.

tain amount of the old traditions under the protection of canon, assuring its impregnability against the onslaught of reason. When Clement of Alexandria made the first real attempt to formulate an accommodation between Christianity and knowledge, he justified himself on the basis of his admiration for the Greek philosophers, an attitude that was blackest heresy from the standpoint of the original church.[11] Christianity had to submit to this innovation because there was no alternative, but there was not the least intention of permitting the faithful to continue in the footsteps of these first theologians. The question of the propriety of handling matters of belief by the techniques of secular wisdom was never resolved and unsettled the church henceforth.

Origen, who often enough asserted the rights of knowledge as against simple belief, still envied this same simplicity to the point where he concluded the introduction of his attack against the pagan Celsus with the observation that it would be best if the treatise were not required to know Celsus' errors, if the testimony of the inner spirit were sufficient. In the west, Jerome was able to found a theological tradition only after the harmlessness of the knowledge he would transmit was guaranteed. At a time when learning in general was rapidly disintegrating, it was possible for the church to retain the illusion that theology could be kept strictly as a handmaiden for faith, but knowledge has emancipated itself completely

---

[11] Ibid., p. 29. Overbeck, Historische Zeitschrift, XLVIII, pp. 454-468.

from Christianity, serving its own ends and not ecclesiastical needs. Derived out of purely religious instincts, theology was intended to protect Christianity against its own weaknesses; instead, by introducing reason into faith, by attempting to provide a plausible, rational basis for religious belief, theology becomes a corrupting influence, part of the secularization of Christianity and of the process by which Christianity entered history.[12]

The general illegitimacy of theology repulsed Overbeck. It had no principles of knowledge of its own -- certainly no Christian ones -- and being in no position to dictate to other fields, acted as a parasite at the table of scholarship.[13] Christian knowledge simply did not exist. Theology's fundamental achievement was to put Christianity in question as a religion:

> Theology stimulates religion to develop contentiousness and fanaticism and thereby to display its most disadvantageous side. Thereby the natural relationship between theology and religion shows itself the clearest: not friendship but enmity. Theology can be called the satan of religion.[14]

For the sake of abstract conceptualizations, theology emptied religion of all that was real and alive.

From this point of view Overbeck could perceive no real distinction between the two theological divisions of the early 1870's, the apologetic and the liberal.

---

[12] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, p. 30.

[13] Ibid., pp. 34, 161-162.

[14] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 13.

> If we have to reproach the apologetic theology [he wrote] with possessing only the shell of the cause they represent, not the kernel, so it would appear by the well known free attitude which the theology customarily called liberal today adopts toward Christian myths and dogmas that the judgment could be raised against this theology that it has thrown out the shell with the kernel.[15]

Apologetics are aimed at defense and presuppose a certain justification of the position of opponents; proofs appeal solely to believers and followers while doing little more than raising doubts in the minds of the outsiders. The two arguments employed the most by apologists, the historical and the scientific, were both worthless and against the spirit of the religion, since Christianity recognized neither history nor science in its pure form. In its youth Christianity had no compunction about placing the picture of Jesus provided in John beside that drawn by the synoptic Gospels, but once the confidence which permitted such an anomaly to occur has vanished, no amount of discussion is going to restore it.[16]

Even more objectionable to Overbeck than this obvious lack of insight or knowledge on the part of apologists for the subject they have determined to protect was the absolute emptiness of their grandiose professions of faith, the lack of conviction which lay behind their words:

> If theologians felt more distinctly than is usually the case what a treacherous thing human speech is, they would speak less, or at least more softly, about many sublime things and let their mouths overflow less when their

---

[15] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 72-73.

[16] Ibid., pp. 44-45, 47-48.

> hearts are empty. But this insight is customarily lacking and here too it is true quem deus perdere vult dementat. The bad habit of interceding in behalf of things which have no inner truth for us generates among them that impure ardor which inflames people for things which they really do not believe in and which is the source of all clerical ill will and all theological fanaticism.[17]

Clearly these modern apologists were too attached to this world to discuss the Christian apocalyptic concept with any degree of conviction or even to speak of miracles as if they believed they lived on a plance where miracles were possible. They valued the blessings of secular culture far above the ascetic ideal and vied with one another in the extravagance of their declarations of loyalty to the new Reich. Their interest was in self-preservation primarily and in Christianity only secondarily; dogmatism and orthodoxy served their purposes far better than a genuine pietism. The profusion of their literary output was exceeded only by their general ineffectiveness in the society where their tracts enjoyed such wide dissemination.[18] "What should be expected from a theology which really believes that belief is a thing that lives in Cloud-Cuckoo-Land where it can take pleasure in a few empty histories or dogmas while seeking nothing or little on earth?"[19] He wrote in Johannesevangelium: "It is said we live in an unbelieving age. That may be, and we critics may demonstrate it. However, certainly our apologists do no less."[20]

---

[17] Ibid., p. 50.

[18] Ibid., pp. 51-62.

[19] Ibid., p. 69.

[20] P. 35.

There was one legitimate form of apology, and that was the life of the believer. To the extent an individual embodied the virtues of Christianity, he might profess this faith to other men.[21] Here is why Overbeck admired Pascal to such an extent and used him as a scale on which to measure other apologists. Pascal was the last of his breed, a Christian apologist who genuinely believed in the uncompromised essentials of his cause and whose genius, combined with the strength of this conviction, permitted argument of unparalleled clarity and energy.[22] Pascal always had his goal firmly in mind and did not allow himself to be deceived as to both the possibilities and limitations of his craft.

> The problem which occupied Pascal is absolutely not the religious one of the reformer of his confession -- on the contrary, he held himself apart from this with all consistency of instinct -- but the mental problem of a representation of Christianity against the world, or, more strongly expressed in Pascal's terminology, Christianity against human nature. This problem has never been conceived in the modern world with the same purity as by Pascal. . . . Whoever would undertake to represent Christianity against knowledge could take no better model than Pascal. No undertaking, however, appears to me to lie further from the modern world than this one.[23]

Unlike the theologians who followed him, Pascal recognized the insufficienty of "metaphysical" and the inadequacy of "historical" proofs for religious demonstrations; faith is, after all, a logical

---

[21] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, p. 46.

[22] See Overbeck's discussion of Pascal in Christentum und Kultur, pp. 126-134.

[23] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 130-131.

absurdity.[24] Amassed evidence in such matters can convince only where there is already a predisposition for conviction, a wish that a particular argument be true.

> In order to awaken such a wish, however, he employed means of a strength for which our apologists certainly lack power although they occasionally imagine that their works 'grew out of Pascal's Pensées.' Pascal sought, above all, to frighten through the thought of death as the door to dark eternity and the narrow insight of man, restlessly flitting between the macrocosm and the microcosm.[25]

The efficacy of the Pensées came also from the extraordinary mixture of irrational and methodological approaches within it, what Overbeck characterized as a vehement will guiding a cool and sharp-seeing intellect. From Overbeck's point of view, in fact, this combination was somewhat too effective for the alternative emphasis on belief and doubt threatened to overwhelm the reader, leaving him dumbfounded.

Pascal's standpoint gained considerable stature and authority when it was realized that Christianity was "his only prejudice." Otherwise, a subtle and thorough-going skepticism and pessimism permitted him to confront the world without bias, either theological or philosophical, and discuss man's position within it. These same attitudes made it necessary for him to establish a personal relation-

---

[24] Pascal wrote: "Who then will blame Christians for not being able to give a reason for their belief, since they profess a religion for which they cannot give a reason? They declare, in expounding it to the world, that it is a foolishness, stultiam; and you complain that they do not prove it! If they proved it, they would not keep their word; it is in lacking proofs that they are not lacking in sense." Pensées, translated by W. F. Trotter (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958), fragment 233.

[25] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 45-46.

ship to his object of defense rather than merely professing it according to a ready made, confessional form. This earnestness was attractive to Overbeck but so, undoubtedly, were the manifold ambiguities, dichotomies and complexities which filled Pascal's writings. There were evident in Pascal's relationship to Catholicism: the church could not become Augustinian as he wished, but as much as he could not tolerate the orthodoxy of his time, he refused to break away from the church. Equivocalness even existed in Pascal's relationship to Jansenism, where Overbeck found him more of a teacher than a pupil. Appropriately, his great apologetic work remained unfinished and futile, himself its victim, a situation Overbeck comprehended only too well.

Both Pascal and Overbeck took on Jesuitism, although in the case of Overbeck the adversary was more obviously a state of mind rather than an identifiable group within the Catholic church. Overbeck looked at the Jesuit order purely in historical terms, noting that it was the product of a particular era of stress within the church and that, actually, it had greater virtues than the morality commonly attributed to it. At a time when the world was becoming rebellious against Catholic domination, the Jesuits fought to maintain the power of the church, albeit increasingly by cunning and compromise. Jesuitism, on the other hand, was of more than this limited historical significance. It appeared in every confession at some period of time, and its sin lay not in immorality but in making

Christianity worldwise.[26]

> Jesuitism is nothing more than the crypto-ascetic representation of Christianity in the world and therefore the consequence of every Christian theology. An ideal Jesuitism of the most sublime form is especially modern Protestant theology.[27]

The Christianity produced by modern theology was intended to be a homogenized, bland cultural form, all traces of asceticism exorcised. Thus the real spiritual heirs of the seventeenth century abbes and court confessors were Ritschl and Harnack. This was true in another sense, too:

> Ritschl seeks as a Protestant again to limit, according to possibility, the freedom which the religious individual won in his confession; he endeavors to restore an equivalent for the concept of church, an analogy for this concept. Pascal, against the theft of individual freedom begun by his church, asserts this freedom up to the outermost . . . limits. Ritschl endangers the individual freedom of Christians in his confession and catholicizes as a Protestant. Pascal in his church moves right up to the borders of heresy and protestantizes as a Catholic.[28]

Pascal, then, showed the method by which an individual could be both a Christian and an apologist for Christianity. He was both a foil and a rebuke for those who, coming afterward, believed themselves working in his tradition. His achievement became even more profound when viewed in the light of his passionate drive for truth

---

[26] For Overbeck's consideration of the Jesuits and Jesuitism, see Christentum und Kultur, pp. 122-126. Also, Nigg, Franz Overbeck, pp. 205-208.

[27] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 125.

[28] Ibid., p. 164.

and his desire to provide the individual with maximum liberty without dissolving the community. Yet, even Pascal had his failings. For all of his skepticism, he was firmly rooted within the Christian sphere, posing a riddle from this source that only Christianity could answer. As Overbeck wryly observed, Pascal was not entirely free from Jesuitism himself: what else was his wager on the existence of God?[29]

The critique of apologetic theology advanced by Christlichkeit was essentially no different than those produced by liberal theologians. The liberals believed that orthodox dogma had long been outdated and that human progress as well as the passage of time necessitated a modification of Christianity in accord with new conditions and a sense of reinterpreting truth. Overbeck, however, proved his singularity by finding the importance of liberal theology lying not in its contrast to apologetic but in its identity, so that both were impartially condemned. This coincidence existed

> Not merely because both agreed in a philosophy of life contrary to Christianity but also because they both indulged in the same errors from different directions in the treatment of the religious forms of Christianity: The apologists that traditional Christianity can be defended by learned means, particularly historical means; the liberals that Christianity can be reconstructed after its critical dissolution by these same means.[30]

The press of the two parties was interchangeable in all basic attitudes and where differences cropped up, they were only questions of degree.[31] In a sense, liberal theology was less hypocritical about

---

[29] Ibid., pp. 128, 133.

[30] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, p. 73.

[31] Ibid., p. 64.

its unChristian nature since it made no pretense about its lack of interest in the faith and vocabulary of original Christianity.[32]

The result of this honesty certainly was no less pernicious to the religion. When Christianity becomes the protean substance the liberals indefatigably proclaim, capable of altering itself to fit the age and culture, it is "the religion with which people can make what they wish."[33]

> In fact [wrote Overbeck] one enervates Christianity when one imputes to it anywhere a reservation in favor of world culture as one needs to do in order not to say that one wants world culture but not Christianity; the result of such a way of looking at things can only be the most offensive sentimentalization, leveling and weakening of Christianity.[34]

This state of affairs was certainly what prevailed in the literature of liberal theologians.

It struck Overbeck as noteworthy that with all of the means of communication at the disposal of these men how immeasurably weaker their accomplishments and influence were when compared with their counterparts in the Reformation. The Reformation disclosed the deception of papal authority, compared itself with the old church, and relied upon Paul for justification. The result was the great act of separation from Rome. Liberal theology proclaimed that most of the New Testament was a fabric of fiction, fell back on original

---

[32] Ibid., p. 73.

[33] Ibid., p. 80.

[34] Ibid., p. 93.

Christianity itself, and rejected Paul for the authority of Jesus. The result was negligible. Dealing with what by all odds was the most popular subject of the nineteenth century, Christianity, theology was the most unpopular field of knowledge. It had no practical use: theology did not increase or strengthen what religion could be to men caught in the vicissitudes of life but undermined it. It had no cultural use: its confusion of faith and reason was barbaric. Apologetic theology offered lies in the name of knowledge, while liberal theology caused complexity by attempting to satisgy religious needs through scholarship. The liberal elevated to the status of new belief what was originally intended as no more than a criticism of the old. Through the waste of power and effort an illusion of progress might be maintained, but it would be no more than that.[35]

Overbeck did not, of course, foresee the rise of modern theology, associated with Harnack, in 1873. He rather thought at that time that he was helping to prepare the shrouds for German theology and when he reissued his essay a generation later, his old adversaries vanquished to the shadows by a new theology, he remarked on the paucity of his talents as a prophet. Nevertheless, the new manifestation confirmed the original thesis: "Theology has been always modern and for that reason was always the natural betrayer of Christianity."[36] Here again rationalism and free-wheeling biblical

---

[35] Ibid., pp. 98-102.

[36] Ibid., p. 217.

criticism eroded Christianity without scruple, and Christianity was hopelessly smothered beneath the cloak of culture.[37]

Regardless of the adjective appended to them, all theologies were equivalent, with one exception. Cursorily and even offhandedly Overbeck let drop a word about a "better" theology which he styled as "critical." The saving grace of this theological form lay in its conscious admission that its objective was not really religious and its service did not exclusively belong to Christianity. It would acknowledge the world-denying soul of Christianity without identifying with it -- for excessive asceticism was detrimental to human existence -- but with sufficient empathy that it would protect this attitude against all efforts to downgrade it. Without either negating or opposing Christianity, critical theology

> Would be able to defend Christianity by accommodating it to the world or by indifference to its view of life either dry it up to a dead orthodoxy which removes it from the world or pull it down into worldliness and let it disappear therein.[38]

Critical theology was at least cognizant of its own harmfulness to Christianity and by admitting this fact surrendered its right to speak in behalf of religion. Despite what Barth would have liked

---

[37] For Overbeck's views on modern theology, see Ibid., pp. 200-217. This section of the afterward to the second of edition of Christlichkeit was not intended as a serious discussion of the subject. Overbeck had more respect for his opponent than to dismiss it superficially. His great polemic against modern theology, as a result, was researched but never composed.

[38] Ibid., pp. 109-110.

to believe, this critical theology was not in any sense of the term a goal pursued by Overbeck. It was a musing inserted into Christlichkeit that was never taken up again. This glimmer of a positive opinion on the potential of theology was overshadowed in subsequent years as his acrimony against the discipline hardened. In the afterward of his 1905 edition Overbeck belittled the import of this lapse in his condemnation of theology, pointing out that he certainly did not know enough about critical theology to be able to promote it as a reformer might. Critical theology, because of its ability for self-analysis, might preserve its own life but not that of Christianity.[39]

There are two further points to take up before leaving the subject of the indictment lodged by Overbeck against theology: the connection between Christlichkeit and Lagarde's Verhältnis des deutschen Staates and, more briefly, the extent of the similarity between Christlichkeit and Nietzsche's David Strauss.

Lagarde's first treatise on the relationship between theology and politics was afforded an enthusiastic reception by Overbeck, who detected a kindred spirit in the author's insistence that dogmatism and historical meditation did not make religion and in his careful, scholarly distinction among Jesus, apostolic Christianity, Pauline Christianity and the historical Christianity which was compromised by pagan culture and learning. Overbeck wrote Lagarde, with whom he had occasionally corresponded since 1864, to acknowledge receipt of

---

[39] Ibid., pp. 162-163.

the essay and to add:

> I must think back many a year before I can recall a theological work that gave me as much of an intellectual feast as did yours. . . . As far as such a new idea is concerned, you will not expect ready understanding, least of all, from someone who in this matter is not altogether uninhibited.[40]

A month later Overbeck commented to Treitschke that the inspiration he received for composing his own study on theology was not from Strauss' confession of a Darwinistic and nationalistic "new faith," which was honest but relatively useless, but from the "far more intelligent pamphlet by Lagarde,"[41] an indebtedness he repeated in the introduction to Christlichkeit.[42]

The essence of Lagarde's argument was that neither Protestantism nor Catholicism represented Christianity, a position Overbeck could scarcely dispute. Lagarde wrote:

> Religion is . . . not ideas about God or reflection on him but personal relation of the religious to God, life with him. It is unconditional present and hope for the future only in so far as intercourse with the eternity of that which works within the believer gives irrefutable certainty that he himself is also eternal. With this insight it is completely incompatible to place historical events in meaningful relationship to religiosity . . . The orthodox Christian view of the past is fetishism, except that it is based on historical facts rather than on natural objects. . . . The eternal spirit of man is not satisfied by past events. It is not religion but sentimentality to immerse oneself in the past, and the consciousness of the imminent temporal

---

[40] February 1, 1873. Quoted in Stern, Politics of Cultural Despair, footnote on p. 67.

[41] March 9, 1873. Bernoulli, Overbeck und Nietzsche, I, p. 85.

[42] P. iv.

> life of eternal forms disappears into the mass in which the memory of primeval, non-repeating facts, growing weaker year by year, is extolled as religion. Our religion becomes an opinion, a judgment, a belief, an idea, instead of being a way of life. Until we give up this fundamentally deadly point of view, a bettering of our condition is not possible. We need the present of God and the Divine, not their past. For that reason . . . Christianity is no longer an option for us.[43]

Like most of the radical Protestant theologians, including Overbeck, Lagarde cherished a good amount of respect for Catholicism, at least in its old forms. The medieval chruch undeniably possessed a rich spiritual life which derived its tremendous strength from the sacrifices of martyrs and the holiness of ascetics. Lagarde's main objection to it was the Eucharist which, for him, embodied the perversions which Paul had forced into Christianity: it was a commemoration not of Jesus' life and message but of his death, his pain not his joy, the unique historical event rather than the everlasting spirit behind it. The Eucharist represented the smothering of the real significance of Jesus' teachings beneath Jewish legalism and dogmatism.[44] This stricture aside, the brunt of Lagarde's criticism of Catholicism was directed against the spirit which had been dominating it for four and a half centuries, Jesuitism, a term he employed in a

---

[43] Lagarde, "Über das Verhältnis des deutschen Staates zu Theologie, Kirche, und Religion" in Deutsche Schriften (Munich: J. F. Lehmann, 1937), pp. 71-73.

[44] Ibid., pp. 63-69. Almost two decades later Nietzsche also condemned Paul for turning the attention of Christians to the way in which Jesus had died rather than the way in which he had lived. (Werke, II, pp. 1195-1197, 1201-1204.)

less universal sense than did Overbeck. To Lagarde, Jesuitism was obscurantism, the lust for power, and a cold, doctrinaire attitude that blotted out true religious feeling. Its culmination was the proclamation of papal infallibility, the keystone of a new Christianity.[45]

As distasteful as these new developments within Catholicism were, they were only the results of a struggle for survival against Protestantism, and Protestantism was Lagarde's central object for vitriol. The Reformation, he felt, had retained all of the worst elements of Catholic dogma and had discarded only those institutions which had hindered it from appropriating the salvation of humanity, already accomplished by Jesus. The new sources of authority for Christianity proclaimed by the reformers, Scripture and individual conscience, were, in reality, no more than polemical weapons to this end. The biblical texts were not reliable, and even if they were, they could never justify the basic doctrines of Protestantism. Justification by faith, according to Lagarde, could not be taken seriously; if the concept were actually upheld, there would be no use for the sacraments and moral admonitions Protestants cherished so much. In any case, justification by faith was a Pauline formula interpolated into the Gospel. Beyond these dubious accomplishments, Lagarde found little effective in the Reformation. The minimal creative force it once possessed was destroyed by the Treaty of Westphalia "for when it received solemn permission to live, it had lost

---

[45] Lagarde, Deutsche Schriften, pp. 57-63.

its last excuse for existence." Thereafter it was the institutionalization of stagnation and reaction, perpetuating German disunity and contributing to the rebirth of German culture only by its inability to prevent this resurgence.[46]

In view of this spectacle of degeneration exhibited by the two major Christian confessions, Lagarde advanced his own program for the future:

> All presently existing religious communities, without a single exception, stand with respect to the state on the edge of death. The sooner they are left to themselves, the sooner they will die out, for their life, of whatever sort, is an artificial one, preserved only by the attention people devote to them and by their antagonism to one another.[47]

The state, he continued, as the representative of the whole nation could ill afford to supply financial or moral support to religious sects which only spoke for part of the population. It should withdraw from Christian denominations entirely, letting them limp along in their spiritual poverty alone as private corporations destined for eventual liquidation. The termination of state assistance was also to apply to theological faculties since these have been constituted not to serve knowledge for the benefit of all but to serve a given church to the detriment of all others; if these schools were to persist at all, it could only be as purely confessional seminaries, wholly supported by the churches themselves.

---

[46] Ibid., pp. 47-57.

[47] Ibid., pp. 75-76.

By these means the stage could be cleared for a truly national religion, which united rather than divided. The state could not create this post Christian faith, but it could pave the way by promoting nonsectarian, "scientific," schools of theology at the purged universities, a theology which studied the history of religion in general in order to find the way back to God and to recover the original sense of the Gospel.[48]

> Our task is not to create a national religion -- religions are never created, but are eternally manifest -- but rather to do all that appears suitable for preparing the way for a national religion and making the nation receptive to the admission of this religion. . . . We ought to be not human but children of God; not liberal but free; not conservative but German; not devout but pious; not Christian but evangelical.[49]

There can be no doubt that Overbeck shared Nietzsche's verdict on Verhältnis des deutschen Staates that it was "in fifty ways false, but in fifty ways right and true -- thus, a very good essay:"[50] the last chapter of Christlichkeit was devoted to Lagarde and some of his arguments. As much as Lagarde's detailed and sardonic description of the transmutations forced upon Christianity by its dogmatists pleased him, despite its rhetorical flavor, Overbeck's section on the essay limited praise of it to the broad statement that it was "uncommonly rich in stimulating and ingenious thoughts."[51] He was much more con-

---

[48] Ibid., pp. 79-89.

[49] Ibid., pp. 89-90.

[50] Letter to Rohde, January 31, 1873. Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit Rohde, p. 394.

[51] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 122-135.

cerned with exposing the inadequacies of Lagarde's proposed theological reforms. The preparation of receptivity for some ill-defined Germanic religion was a chimerical activity to Overbeck, evidently overshadowing in its wrong-headedness the correctness of Lagarde's insights into Christianity. The very correctness of these insights probably made it more pressing that wrong conclusions which might have been drawn from them be counteracted.[52]

Lagarde, Overbeck stated, had accurately identified one of the sorest points in theology: the existence of ecclesiastical vows and the imposition of limits upon theologians with respect to their freedom of inquiry proved beyond doubt that the often repeated tenet concerning the compatibility of faith and reason was sheer illusion. Any field of knowledge establishes its own methods and can recognize as proven only what is elicited by this method. Sectarian prejudice, by preventing the straightforward application of this fact to theology, falsifies results.

Lagarde's solution to this dilemma was the creation of two theologies, one dedicated to particular denominations and the other to knowledge. Overbeck conceived various objections to this solution. First of all, the existing theological faculties would never permit themselves to be reduced to the status of purely confessional seminaries, for no Lutheran or Catholic theology worth its salt could ever become reconciled to the idea that it spoke only for its own church and not the entirety of Christendom. Of even greater significance

---

[52] The following discussion of Overbeck's critique of Lagarde is based upon Christlichkeit, pp. 122-135.

was the dubious character of what Lagarde was promoting in the place of the extant departments of theology. Lagarde's theology possessed only tenuous claims to its own name. Once a theological faculty is released from its primary obligation of educating clerical students, it clearly enters the province of philosophy, and Lagarde's new theology, essentially a panoramic study of all religion, was no exception. If Lagarde would wish to preserve his theology from being absorbed by philosophy faculties, he would have to prove the existence of a particular practical task to which this discipline might be turned as an independent unit.

> But this is just what must be doubted: whether a task of this sort can really be found for Lagarde's theology. He himself designates one in that he says to us the new theology ought to be 'the pathfinder of a German religion.' But theologies have always followed after their religions, and, to be sure, the later they have come, the more energetic and undisputed the original forces behind these religions. That they should precede their religions is unprecedented, and it is scarcely to be anticipated that something of the sort could yet occur. To be certain, Lagarde believes himself capable of 'suspecting' that this new theology 'would be able to calculate from the path of the blessed star of religion up to now the curve of its future travels.' Still, it could be asserted that such a suspicion is possible only through an excess, a sort of possession by scientific rationalism which itself might break into the most extreme intangibility, visible only by ecstatic prophets.[53]

It was inconceivable that Lagarde's theology could achieve what it was supposed to; no theology was capable of preparing for such an adventure. The probable fate of the attempt "because of the purely historical character of its task, because of the hopelessness of its ultimate goal, and because of the overwhelming power of his-

---

[53] Ibid., p. 129.

tory in all present day scholarly studies" would be that the new theology "would rapidly lose sight of its goal, immerse itself in its historical material, and become a purely historical discipline."[54] The net result of Lagarde's scheme to separate theology from its past base thus became reducible to the division of the subject into two separate disciplines, the practical side belonging to the confessional seminaries and the theoretical side to the state-supported faculties in the universities. This wanton dissolution of the original bond which existed between the two sides destroyed the only hope for theology to reconstruct the foundations of ecclesiastical matters; theory and practice, in Overbeck's opinion, cannot be so readily compartmentalized.

Overbeck also did not look upon the prospect of a complete separation of church and state with less misgiving. Certainly the greatest reason for apprehension was the impossibility of predicting to any satisfactory degree the outcome of a divorce between these two institutions. Conceivably church-state relations would alter their basis for the better, but the only certain effect would be the disintegration of the Protestant churches, an event in which Overbeck could find no particular advantage. He assumed that the unrestrained proliferation of autonomous religious sects would pose an extreme danger to culture, and, although he did not elaborate further on this theme, he felt that the state would find it advantageous to counteract this peril by preventing religious disintegra-

---

[54] Ibid., p. 130.

tion. Of course, extant theological faculties were the simplest means to this end.

If, as Lagarde maintained, the consequences of the policy under which the government contributed to the scientific education of Protestant clerics has been the alienation of the most sensitive, who would rather enter medicine or philology than to swear vows which turned them into hypocrites -- and Overbeck fully granted the truth of this observation -- then the fully scientific theology would completely decimate the spiritual ranks. It seemed far more sensible and appropriate to Overbeck that the ordination vows be abolished, rather than the theological faculties.

A religious community, Overbeck argued, had the right to defend its own integrity by regulating the public pronouncements of its ministers, but there was no justification for limiting and directing their personal views and convictions. So long as a pastor sincerely devoted himself to the needs of his congregation, so long as he expressed to them the beliefs which they held holy, he did all that was humanly necessary regardless of the extent to which his scholarship eroded his own religious faith. To demand that a pastor declare from his own soul what education made absolutely impossible for him to believe was to open the door wide to hypocrisy.[55] This compromise, of course, was precisely the one Overbeck struck in his teaching, which might account for the zeal with which he advanced the rationality of this one reform is a book otherwise remarkable

---

[55] Ibid., pp. 136-145.

for its lack of positive programs.

These objections to Lagarde's tract were serious ones. However, because they concerned solely the possibility of theological reform and because the brotherhood of social critics who commented favorably on the pamphlet was so small in 1873 -- it included Treitschke, Johann Bachofen and Cosima Wagner[56] -- extreme cordiality was maintained between Lagarde and Overbeck nevertheless. Lagarde wrote to Overbeck of his appreciation of the church historian's "courageous significant work" and expressed agreement with the judgment on theology contained in it, contenting himself with the supposition that the hard words about his new theology were the product of misunderstanding. "To be certain," he added, "I write so awkwardly that it is very possible to misunderstand me."[57] A year later Overbeck and Nietzsche spent a winter's Sunday reading aloud to each other from Lagarde's new collection of four essays, Politische Aufsätzen, and in 1875 Overbeck was so impressed by Lagarde's Über die gegenwartige Lage des deutschen Reichs (Concerning the Present Condition of the German Empire) that he regretted no longer standing well enough with the editor of the Literarisches Centralblatt, Friedrich Zarncke, to be able to submit a review of this essay. Periodically during the 1870's Overbeck submitted invitations to Lagarde to

a

---

[56] Stern, Politics of Cultural Despair, p. 43. Robert Lougee, Paul de Lagarde: A Study of Radical Conservatism in Germany (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 219-220, 228-230.

[57] Letter of August 8, 1873. Overbeckiana, I, pp. 102-103.

visit him in Basel, but nothing came of it. "I could wish," Overbeck wrote to the Gottingen scholar, "for no other reader among theologians than yourself."[58]

The two men obviously shared a number of perspectives which extended far beyond mere theological considerations. Lagarde's conservative distrust of absolutism and his insistence upon the rights of the individuals as against demands of the state touched a responsive chord in Overbeck, although Overbeck came to this position from a liberal idealism. Both valued above all an aristocratic individualism, a firm belief in the necessity of the individual recognizing his own potential and developing it fully, and both were concerned that the mediocrity of German education hindered this achievement. Neither had much use for the accomplishments of the mass civilization of the nineteenth century, especially the treacherous popular press. Just as Overbeck and Nietzsche attacked the "cultural philistines" so Lagarde railed against the "cultural barbarism" of his time,[59] as evidence of the low state into which culture had fallen. Lagarde's contempt for materialism, for sterile and passive concumption of culture, for the crassness and stupidity which permeated all aspects of public and private life placed him solidly within the spirit of the Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen.

---

[58] Benz, Nietzsches Ideen, p. 136. Lougee, Paul de Lagarde, pp. 7, 29. Lougee describes Overbeck as "an Evangelical theologian who sought a culture dissolved from Christianity" and depicts him as essentially a neoromantic who dangerously approached being a disciple of Lagarde. (Ibid., especially pp. 228-344)

[59] Stern, Politics of Cultural Despair, p. 105.

Yet, the differences were just as numerous, and with the passage of years they became predominant. Both men defined Christianity in mystical or pietistic terms, but only Lagarde appropriated this definition for himself, muddying scholastic objectivity with a conception of Divine revelation unfolding through history and of the individual gaining his uniqueness by being an agent for the will of Providence. Although Overbeck wrote of the interdependence between the individual and the community, he never allowed himself the extravagance of Lagarde's romantic organicism and the presumption of a confluence between God and the communal Volksgeist always struck him as unproven and unprovable. Even more, Lagarde's critique of religion and theology was never intended as an independent act but as the backbone for his political program. His ultimate aim was not dispassionate scholarship but the education of the German nation, the revitalization of its soul so that it might be prepared to shoulder its destiny and dominate a resurrected Holy Roman Empire, Mitteleuropa.

Lagarde, after all was not merely an amanuensis for cultural crisis but a prophet with a distinct mission. It was this sense of righteousness which turned him against all he considered foreign, divisive, or arbitrary and produced a rigid narrowness much too controlled by prejudice. It was this same quality which offended Overbeck's reasoned cosmopolitanism. When, in the early 1880's, Lagarde's antisemitism mounted to the pitch displayed by such disquisitions as Die graue Internationale (The Gray International) and Programm für die konservativ Partei Preussens (Programm for the Prussian Conservative Party), the correspondence with Overbeck came to an end. In his

reminiscences about Nietzsche, Overbeck compared his old friend with Lagarde and passed his final judgment on the latter:

> Nietzsche is already too 'rhetorical' to me but how genuine is his rhetoric and how much it is based upon real feeling in comparison to Lagarde's. Both are great in self-appraisal, but how much greater is the element of vanity in Lagarde's self-reflections! Nietzsche was incapable of such lack of taste as displayed by Lagarde when he depicted his own glorification at the Last Judgment in a poem on the subject. Nietzsche measured himself against the living and the real; only Lagarde got ecstatic about this matter and measured himself against the hereafter. Nietzsche never took himself as 'seriously' as did this schoolmaster.[60]

When speaking of the chapter on Strauss in Christlichkeit, Löwith wrote: "In a few sober sentences, this criticism of Strauss' Bekenntnis says everything that Nietzsche in his Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungesaid with the exuberance of youth, and without a fair assessment of Strauss' historical achievement."[61] As flattering as this evaluation is to Overbeck, it is a misleading comparison. To be certain, Overbeck always acknowledged the 1835 edition of Leben Jesu as a classic, the culmination of a particular epoch of scholarship and repository for bold insights into Christianity and the possibility of historical research into its early literature,[62] and he defended the accomplishments of Strauss when they were subjected to attack by apologetic or liberal theologians. Nietzsche

---

[60] Overbeck, Die neue Rundschau (1906), p. 226.

[61] Löwith, From Hegel to Nietzsche, p. 378.

[62] See, for example, Overbeck's review of Strauss; revised Leben Jesu in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 19 (May 6, 1865), columns 489-493.

also sympathized with the early Strauss, an earnest and critical servant of truth.[63] Withal, the Strauss that both he and Nietzsche were particularly concerned with in 1873 was not the young pioneer who shocked his contemporaries by conclusively denying the historical credibility of the Gospels on the basis of their mythological and superstitious character and by relocating the divine essence in humanity after loosing it from transcendence. Their subject was the old man, confined to his sick room and a victim of his times as much as bad health. They faulted the author of Der alte und neue Glaube who felt he had dismissed Christianity when he had punctured a handful of basic dogmas and who substituted for the old rites materialism, Darwinism, progress, nationalism and the vision of a middle class morality operating in a universe that is at once orderly, rational and good. This was the veteran radical who, with the passage of time, had comfortably wedged himself into a niche within the establishment; he was worthy of repudiation only with respect to what he had become.

An even greater misapprehension on the part of Lowith is that Nietzsche and Overbeck tended to make the same essential points in their respective treatments of Strauss. Nietzsche scorned Strauss as a self-proclaimed prophet, pretentiously composing an ill-styled catechism for the religion of the future, a document which had the felicitous quality of being forgotten immediately after perusal as if

---

[63] Nietzsche, Werke, I, p. 189.

no old religion had been demolished and no new one instituted.[64] He found Strauss' condescending praise of the greatest minds of history unpalatable in view of the man's obvious insensitivity and Strauss' nit-picking criticisms almost obscene.[65] Equally as offensive was Strauss' good-humoured presumption that if Christianity were replaced by Darwin and a mechanistic universe the traditional moral values would come through the change unscathed.

> Strauss has not even learned that no idea can make man more moral and better and that preaching morals is as easy as founding morals is difficult. His task ought to have been to take the phenomena of human goodness, mercy, love and self-abnegation, which after all are already present, and to explain and derive them seriously out of his Darwinian presuppositions; however, he preferred to flee the task of explanation by a leap into imperatives. . . . he assumes without basis that all past events have the highest intellectual value, that it was absolutely reasonably and intentionally arranged thus, and that, therefore, it contained a revelation of eternal goodness.[66]

The sanction and source of moral values was the theme of Nietzsche's works, and it was natural that the attention he directed to Strauss would reflect this interest. Strauss served Overbeck's more limited purposes not in Nietzsche's sense as an incarnation of the spiritual vacuity of postwar Germany but as evidence that even the theologian who did not belong to any constituted school was incapable of recognizing the character of Christianity. Regrettably, like the apologists and liberals, Strauss believed religion to be

---

[64] Ibid., pp. 149-152.

[65] Ibid.; see especially pp. 152-161.

[66] Ibid., pp. 168, 170.

embodied in a stock of doctrines and pronouncements rather than in a philosophy of life, and, as a result, there was no real possibility of accurately gauging what Strauss was promoting as an alternative to the "old faith." Nietzsche's essay did not take up a comparison of Strauss' religion of the future with Christianity since his concern was the betterment of culture and his interest in religion was secondary to this aim. Overbeck readily avowed a profundity and depth in Christianity and required that whatever aspired to replace it be of a higher nature rather than a lower. He was unconvinced that Strauss had met this requirement, particularly since the ideal he proffered the Germans was so unwise as to act as if Christianity never existed, as if it were a bad dream from which mankind need only awake in order to have all traces of it evaporate in the morning sun. The mechanistic cosmos which Strauss wanted to substitute for the Christian concept of God seemed to Overbeck a meager consolation. It was an open invitation to "hollow, unfruitful, and therefore false resignation" and the ultimate withdrawal of each individual into hopeless egoism, making impossible the continuance of "all true human existence."[67]

There were, certainly, a few passages in David Strauss and Christlichkeit that were directly parallel. Overbeck criticized Strauss for dismissing the central life style of Christianity, asceticism, with two or three disparaging and marginal remarks,[68]

---

[67] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, pp. 116-118.

[68] Ibid., p. 111.

and Nietzsche likewise made sarcastic reference to the "dissolute vulgarity of sentiment" which led Strauss to explain "the terribly serious drive toward denial and the movement of ascetic sanctification in the first century of Christianity" as a reaction to a supposed previous era of secual license and excess.[69] Overbeck inserted into his catalogue of unsatisfactory alterations which Strauss introduced into the "old faith" a brief aside to the effect that Straussian ethics had no foundation, the point which concerned Nietzsche so much.[70] Earlier in Christlichkeit he even employed a typically Nietzschean turn of phrase, alluding to the danger raised by the postwar nationalistic ebullience of the Germans being conquered by their victory and falling victim to presumption.[71]

Far more important than single citations was the community of spirit expressed by the two books, an "unseasonable" concern that those who strutted about as the protectors of culture and religion were in reality the new barbarians who were actively engaged in razing both. Overbeck's measured phraseology revealed this spirit palpably in the umbrage he took at the nationalism of Strauss' bourgeois religion, which was extremely solicitous of the requirements of both Bismarck's Germany and the Hohenzollern dynasty and convinced that the road to humanitarianism lay through patriotism not

---

[69] Nietzsche, Werke, I, p. 166. For Strauss on this point, see Der alte und neue Glaube: Ein Bekenntnis (Bonn: Emil Strauss, 1879), pp. 252-258.

[70] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, p. 118.

[71] Ibid., p. 61.

through the egotism of cosmopolitanism -- a plague Strauss variously anathematized as socialistic, ultramontane, anti-intellectual and contrary to the divine order of things.[72] Strauss' life beyond Christianity, wrote Overbeck, transported mankind

> Approximately to the standpoint of the philistine of the Roman Empire who had his religion in the 'mystery' of the head of state; whom the army protected in quiet enjoyment of his property against external enemies and the strength of the law against internal; who passed the dismal hours which the state was not in position to prevent him in occupation with a dead art; and who, in fact, in so far as he had the possibility to be Christian and was not, was perhaps the most antiChristian figure in history. This standpoint was so low that, in order to prove its baseness, it could not appeal to either Christianity or pre-Christian Graeco-Roman paganism.[73]

This was the fruit of a situation in which the state had reached the objective of uncontested and unconditional control over all subsidiary powers, and this was the ideal toward which Strauss was urging western man. With all of his gymnastics about achieving a feeling for mankind by submitting to the state, Strauss would appear to neglect the "trifle" that we are human beings. Strauss, concluded Overbeck, dismissed cosmopolitanism far too easily.

> He himself knows that it is not necessarily the feeling in which one 'wants to know nothing' of his nation. He himself cannot pass by the nobler forms of cosmopolitanism which our great thinkers and poets represent and can reasonably have nothing against it when they 'embraced the whole of humanity in their empathy and longed to see their ideas of beautiful morality and rational freedom gradually realized among all nations.' And yet, instead

---

[72] Strauss, Der alte und neue Glaube, pp. 263-367.

[73] Overbeck, Christlichkeit, p. 113.

> of reflecting on this here, instead of saying to us . . . that we should 'not forget' these noble models, he conceives of doing nothing better with them than to turn suddenly against internationalists. It may be that 'this sort of world-citizen' ought not to call upon Goethe and Schiller; how far may Strauss do it here?[74]

Like Nietzsche, Overbeck had undertaken to probe the prejudices of the cultural philistine, although he limited his explorations to only one species, the theologian, the "figaro of Christianity."[75] Unlike Nietzsche, he had no purposes beyond that of presenting a critique. Nietzsche was a philosopher opening up the future while Overbeck had no ambitions beyond being a scholar who clarified the past. Nietzsche wrote in behalf of a new ethical and cultural life for humanity; Lagarde and Strauss offered a new sort of religion. Overbeck could not associate himself with any of these endeavors, whatever their value:

> Because I deny theology the right to represent Christianity, I renounce this right above all so that it can appear in the little book as if I renounce Christianity as plainly as theology [for example, at the end of the forward]. And yet fundamentally I had only an interest in renouncing theology while the departure from Christianity bound up with it was a matter of indifference to me because it appeared without any assistance on my part as something given. So my attitude toward things is entirely different from Kierkegaard, who attacked Christianity although he represented it, while I leave it unattacked although I stand aside and thereby, at the same time, speak as a theologian without wanting to be one. Kierkegaard speaks under a paradoxical signboard as a reformer of Christianity. I intend that the least, but neither do I intend to reform theology. I acknowledge its

---

[74] Ibid., pp. 114-115.

[75] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 270-271, 274.

worthlessness on and for itself and do not dispute only its temporarily complete disrepair and its foundation. Christianity I leave to itself for the present without any reservation.[76]

---

[76] Ibid., p. 291.

VIII. CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

In the last analysis, the historical and theological questions with which Overbeck occupied himself from the time that he accepted the appointment at Basel until his death were all reducible to one essential: the peculiar interconnection between Christianity and culture, a tension produced by the forced union of antipodal elements. Christianity did not recognize the existence of culture except as a danger, something to be renounced along with the rest of the present world, but this renunciation could not stand once Christian expectations for the final judgment were not fulfilled. Christianity had to enter the world and absorb its culture for self-preservation.

Overbeck's statements on what, precisely, constituted culture were ambiguous but seemed to be based on a concept analogous to a description provided by Nietzsche in David Strauss:

> Above all culture is the unity of artistic style in all the expressions of the life of a people. Abundant knowledge and learning is, however, not a necessary means of culture nor a sign of it, and, if need arise, they might get along better with the opposite of culture, barbarism: that is, with the lack of style or chaotic muddle of all styles.[1]

Under the rubric of culture Overbeck listed virtually the totality of human expression, including religion, once the vitality and independence of this manifestation had decayed sufficiently that its life

---

[1] Nietzsche, Werke, I, p. 140.

could be artificially sustained only by the sufference of culture. "Our Christianity became culture among us a long time ago, but our culture is beginning to abandon Christianity, proof that we men defend our culture more securely than our religions."[2]

When Christianity was catapulted into a drive for world conquest, an impulse already noticeable in Paul, it was actually overpowered, although this fact was not readily demonstrable. Institutionalized as the church, Christianity enjoyed its historical blossoming in the Middle Ages, when it surpassed all other contemporary social organisms and dominated the whole structure and organization of western civilization.[3] At that time culture was a matter handled by the theologians.[4] The Reformation, although thoroughly steeped in the outlook of medieval theology, initiated the process by which church and society fell apart, an operation which reached its high tide in the Enlightenment, guided by the passionate desire to eradicate Christianity completely from culture in order to permit free development of purely secular interests.

Overbeck's interpretation of the Enlightenment was extreme, since it ignored a predominant eighteenth century sentiment that was not anti-religious or even antiChristian but only anti-Church. Still, it served to illustrate the point he was attempting to make: as heirs

---

[2] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, p. 247.

[3] Ibid., pp. 95-98, 279.

[4] Ibid., p. 271.

of both the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment we could ill afford to repeat their mistakes, however much we might feel in sympathy with one or the other of the two opposing outlooks these periods represented. Overbeck certainly favored adoption of the reservations expressed by the Enlightenment concerning a culture unconditionally dominated by religion, but only on condition that the blindness about the place of religion within culture was not also absorbed. The nature of the Middle Ages has assured that whatever man has produced since the time of Constantine has been unalterably shaped to some degree by Christianity. Christianity cannot simply be written off as Strauss attempted to do. Overbeck's insistence on this idea rather recalls Burckhardt's emphasis on historical epochs being determined by the particular equilibrium of religious, political and cultural concerns such that one element may temporarily dominate but never eliminate the other two. The other extreme, the error of the Middle Ages, the overvaluation of the benefits of religious hegemony was also a thing to be avoided naturally, but scarcely a pressing danger in the nineteenth century.[5]

The great religious oracle of the nineteenth century, in Overbeck's estimation, was Bismarck:

> To be certain, Bismarck has not been a modern theologian, but more than anyone else he is responsible for modern theology. At any rate he has done more for its historical existence than Ritschl and Harnack. They are only Bismarck's theological creatures. In our present time Bis-

---

[5] Ibid., pp. 248, 273.

> marck has been as the great statesman which he was also the most instructive object of the power-worshipper which we have had among us -- a second Napoleon for the nineteenth century.[6]

Bismarck possessed religion because it was useful to him, and he employed it as was necessary for the furtherance of his secular ambitions. He had no desire to spend any time in contemplation of the riddles Christianity claimed to have solved or even to test the validity of these solutions. His Christianity was an adjunct to his political activities. He was, in brief, perfect evidence of how little in the world really depended upon possession of a religious faith.[7]

That theologians should deliver Christianity into the hands of such a man was not particularly astonishing to Overbeck in view of the treasonous attitude inevitably adopted by theology with respect to the object it represented. Overbeck called Ritschl a lesser Bismarck and compared his position to that of Bossuet under Louis XIV.[8] Despite the natural proclivities of Christianity, the continual aim of theology was modernity not clarity with respect to religion. "Modern" was a word that grated on Overbeck and suggested to him superficiality and the passing novelties of the masses. To be modern was to be in the mode, to renounce any claims to being eternal or valuable;

---

[6] Ibid., p. 155.

[7] Ibid., pp. 148-149.

[8] Ibid., pp. 166, 176-177.

it was built-in obsolescence. It was a charter lying in the street for public use, inviting anyone who wished to do so to chatter idly about the most sublime things. It was the occupational disease of all theologians who sought the new rather than the genuine. Thus, to Overbeck, modern Christianity had about as much value as a fashionable hat and was not a concept worth taking more seriously than that.[9]

It was the characteristic of the modern era to have abandoned Christianity and to present, instead, a chameleon-like religion so hollow that it could be applied to all manner of irreligiosity without the least qualm. In this respect there was no essential difference among the denominations.[10] For that matter, theology performed no positive service for culture either, although it was for this cause that Christianity had presumably been sold out. Conceiving themselves to be placed in the unique position of mediators between Christianity and culture, theologians were, in reality, the cultural philistines of every age, having a passion for culture but no aptitude. The cultural feeling that they displayed was in bad conscience.[11] They had become catspaws of the wielders of power and functionaries in the apparatus of state, thinking of Christianity as a means to world conquest rather than world renunciation.

---

[9] Ibid., pp. 243-246. Overbeckiana, II, pp. 100-101.

[10] Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, pp. 118-122, 275.

[11] Ibid., pp. 270-271.

Here, to Overbeck, was a telling symptom of how far the decay of Christianity had progressed. Once a force with the power to assimilate peoples and elevate them over their divisions, Christianity had proven itself powerless to prevent the rise of nationalism in Europe and had even assisted the victory of this ideology.[12] In the state lay the great enemy of the individual and in chauvinism the great enemy of western culture, which had been the true victim of the wars of the nineteenth century. He wrote:

> The state is the real corrupter of men. It needs only to make all the talents of men -- religion, morality, knowledge -- serviceable to itself and to use them for its own purposes in order to corrupt them to their roots. Only the surface of everything is at all attractive to it. What lies beneath is irrelevant to it, even dangerous.[13]

In Germany the cost to culture of the victory of the nation state had been particularly heavy. Although the war with France was supposed to have determined once and for all the superiority of Germanic culture and Wilhelmine scholars had no hesitation about declaring that only the Germans had a philosophic depth comparable to that of the ancient Greeks, Overbeck saw indications of intellectual shabbiness and cultural penury on all sides:

> Presently we Germans have no culture. We have no philosophy left, only its professors. In the most favorable cases there are ruins of an old possession upon which only a decadent people may base its present. What is called German culture at the moment is something much too unoriginal, something that by the same manner has been spread much too far.[14]

---

[12] Ibid., pp. 98, 113-114, 256.

[13] Ibid., p. 254.

[14] Ibid., pp. 247-248.

The culture of the Reich was a triviality which ransacked the works of the giants of the past, particularly Goethe, for its material. Its literature, the barometer for the condition of culture, was barbaric.[15]

On this basis alone, if the solution to the difficulties created by the amalgamation of Christianity and culture was simply to decide for one or the other, for asceticism or for the world, it would have been impossible for Overbeck to have made his choice. Werner Elert's proposal that Overbeck would have turned his back on monasticism to affirm culture cannot withstand the objections raised against it by Overbeck's high estimation of the creative virtues of this view of life.[16] The choice did not exist, however, any more than it did, except in a purely relative sense, in any of Overbeck's complex dualities. This peculiar irresolution and negativism is undoubtedly unsatisfactory but, as Nigg has pointed out, how else could such a question be discussed except in this manner?[17]

Overbeck did not enter into his investigations for the sake of solutions but in order to pursue particular matters to their end as honestly as possible. His was the courage to openly face ambiguity

---

[15] Ibid., pp. 147-148, 252-254.

[16] See: Werner Elert, Der Kampf um das Christentum: Geschichte der Beziehungen zwischen dem Evangelischen Christentum in Deutschland und dem allgemeinen Denken seit Schleiermacher und Hegel (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1921), pp. 438-439, 442.

[17] Nigg, Franz Overbeck, p. 166.

with nothing more than the capacity for critical analysis. He was the first man of our time working within the borders of theology to discuss the relationship between Christianity and culture in such a way that our distance from the former became perfectly clear; it was, in fact, this distance which provided him understanding and insight. Many men have compiled the requisite evidence to confirm that the modern era is indeed post Christian but none have done so with so much scrupulous regard for scholarship and so little emotional involvement. Moreover, no one has been so zealous in arguing that the most ardent protectors of Christianity have been its most deadly enemies, that it has been theology which has made Christianity so problematical and brought it to its grave.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Overbeck's Publications:

Books

Quaestionum Hippolytearum specimen summe venerabilis Theologorum ordinis Jenensis consensu et auctoritate pro gradu Licentiati et docendi potestate rite obtinendis die IV. mensis Augusti anno MDCCCLXIV in publico defendet Franciscus Camillus Overbeck, Doctor Philosophiae, candidatus Theologiae. Jena: Schreiber und Sohn, 1864.

Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette: Kurze Erklärung der Apostelgeschichte. Fourth edition, edited and enlarged. Leipzig: Hirzel, 1870.

Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie, Streit- und Friedenschrift. First edition. Leipzig: E. W. Fritzsch, 1873.

Studien zur Geschichte der alten Kirche, Erstes Heft. Schloss-Chemnitz: Ernst Schmeitzner, 1875.

Zur Geschichte des Kanons. Zwei Abhandlungen. Schloss-Chemnitz: Ernst Schmeitzner, 1880.

Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie, Streit- und Friedenschrift. Second edition. Leipzig: C. G. Naumann, 1903.

Articles

"Die sogenannten Scholien des Oekumenius zur Apokalypse," Zeitschrift für wissenschaftlichen Theologie, VII (1864), pp. 192ff.

"Über zwei neue Ansichten von Zeugnissen des Papias für die Apostelgeschichte und das vierte Evangelium," Zeitschrift für wissenschaftlichen Theologie, X (1867), pp. 35ff.

"Cäsarea," in Bibel-Lexikon. Realwörterbuch zum Handgebrauch für Geistliche und Gemeindeglieder, Vol. I. Edited by Daniel Schenkel. Leipzig: 1869. Pp. 499-500.

"Felix," in Bibel-Lexikon. Realwörterbuch zum Handgebrauch für Geistliche und Gemeindeglieder, Vol. II. Edited by Daniel Schenkel. Leipzig: 1869. Pp. 263-264.

"Festus," in Bibel-Lexikon. Realwörterbuch zum Handgebrauch für Geistliche und Gemeindeglieder, Vol. II. Edited by Daniel Schenkel. Leipzig: 1869. Pp. 275-276.

"Ikonium," in Bibel-Lexikon. Realwörterbuch zum Handgebrauch für Geistliche und Gemeindeglieder, Vol. III. Edited by Daniel Schenkel. Leipzig: 1871. Pp. 303-304.

"Lazarus," in Bibel-Lexikon. Realwörterbuch zum Handgebrauch für Geistliche und Gemeindeglieder, Vol. IV. Edited by Daniel Schenkel. Leipzig: 1872. P. 17.

"Über das Verhältnis Justins des Märtyrers zur Apostelgeschichte," Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie, XV (1872), pp. 305-349.

"Aus dem Briefwechsel des Augustin mit Hieronymus," Historische Zeitschrift, XLII (1879), pp. 222-259.

"Über die Anfänge der patristischen Literatur," Historische Zeitschrift, XLVIII (1882), pp. 417-472.

"Zum Danielcitat Hermae Pastoris IV, 2.4," Theologische Literaturzeitung, X (1885), column 341.

Universitätsprogramme and Lectures

Über Entstehung und Recht einer rein historischen Betrachtung der neutestamentlichen Schriften in der Theologie. Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1871.

Über den pseudojustinischen Brief an Diognet. Basel: C. Schultze, 1872.

Über die Auffassung des Streits des Paulus mit Petrus in Antiochen (Galatians 2, 11ff.) bei den Kirchenvätern. Basel: C. Schultze, 1877.

Über die Anfänge der Kirchengeschichtsschreibung. Basel: L. Reinhardt, 1892. (Republished, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1965.)

Die Bischofslisten und die apostolische Nachfolge in der Kirchengeschichte des Eusebius. Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1898.

Book Reviews

Richard Adelbert Lipsius: Der Gnostizismus sein Wesen, Ursprung und Entwicklungsgang; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 30 (July 26, 1862), columns 619-620.

Gustav Flügel: Mâni, seine Leben und seine Schriften; in Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft, XVI (1862), pp. 765ff.

Edmond von Pressensé: Geschichte der drei ersten Jahrhunderte der christlichen Kirche, Vol. I; in Literarisches Centralblatt fur Deutschland, No. 5 (January 30, 1863), columns 98-99.

Ferdinand Christian Baur: Kirchengeschichte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 8 (February 21, 1863), columns 169-172.

Karl Hase: Handbuch der protestantischen Polemik gegen die römisch-katholische Kirche; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 15 (April 11, 1863), columns 337-339.

Edmond von Pressensé: Geschichte der ersten drei Jahrhunderte der christlichen Kirche, Vol. II; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 29 (July 18, 1863), columns 674-675.

Ernst Renan: Vie de Jésus. Sixth edition; in Literarisches Centralblatt fur Deutschland, No. 45 (November 7, 1863), columns 1057-1059.

Gabriel Johannes Baptista Günter: Introductio in sacros Novi Testamenti libros historico-critica et apologetica; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 27 (July 2, 1864), columns 625-626.

Friedrich Wilhelm Krummacher: Die Wahrheit der evangelischen Geschichte, besiegelt durch die ältesten nachapostolischen Zeugen. Ein Vortrag gehalten im evangelischen Verein zu Potsdam; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 28 (July 9, 1864), columns 650-651.

Eduard Reuss: Die Geschichte der Heiligen Schriften Neuen Testaments. Fourth edition; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 29 (July 16, 1864), columns 675-676.

Louis Gaussen: Die Aechtheit der Heiligen Schriften vom Standpunkt der Geschichte und des Glaubens, Part I; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 31 (July 30, 1864), columns 721-723.

Edmond Scherer and Athanese Coquerel: Zwei französische Stimmen über Renans Leben Jesu; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 37 (September 10, 1864), column 865.

Daniel Schenkel: Das Charakterbild Jesu. Ein biblischer Versuch. Second edition; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 2 (January 7, 1865), columns 33-35.

Friedrich von Raumer: Schwarz, Strauss, Renan. Ein Vortrag; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 4 (January 21, 1865), column 81.

A. Stap: Études historiques et critiques sur les origines du christianisme; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 8 (February 18, 1865), columns 197-198.

Adolf Hilgenfeld: Bardesanes, der letzte Gnostiker; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 8 (February 18, 1865), columns 198-199.

David Friedrich Strauss: Das Leben Jesu für das deutsche Volk bearbeitet. Second edition; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 19 (May 6, 1865), columns 489-493.

Constantin Tischendorf: Wann wurden unsere Evangelien verfasst; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 20 (May 13, 1865), columns 521-523.

Julius Meyer: Das Leben Jesu für das deutsche Volk bearbeitet von David Friedrich Strauss und die Stellung der Gegenwart zum Christentum; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 36 (September 2, 1865), column 937.

Friedrich Schleiermacher: Das Leben Jesu. Vorlesungen an der Universität Berlin im Jahre 1832 gehalten; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 42 (October 14, 1865), columns 1105-1108.

David Friedrich Strauss: Der Christus des Glaubens und der Jesus der Geschichte. Ein Kritik des Schleiermacher'schen Lebens Jesu; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 43 (October 21, 1865), column 1129.

Charles Dollfus: A propos de la nouvelle vie de Jésus par David Strauss; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No.44 (October 28, 1865), column 1161.

Ferdinand Christian Baur: Vorlesungen über neutestamentliche Theologie; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 7 (February 10, 1866), columns 161-163.

Oscar Jäger: Die Zerstorung von Jerusalem durch Titus Flavius Vespasianus, Vortrag; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 20 (May 12, 1866), columns 531-532.

August Klostermann: Vindiciae Lucanae seu de itinerarii in libro Actorum asservati auctore; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 22 (May 26, 1866), columns 585-588.

Otto Thenius: Das Evangelium der Evangelien. Ein offenes Sendschreiben an Herrn Dr. D. Fr. Strauss in Beziehung auf dessen Leben Jesu für das deutsche Volk; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 23 (June 2, 1866), columns 610-612.

Friedrich Immanuel Tafel: Das Leben Jesu, nach den Berichten der Evangelisten gerechtfertigt und vertheidigt gegen die Angriffe des Dr. Strauss und des Unglaubens überhaupt; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 31 (July 28, 1866), columns 818-819.

Theodor Keim: Der geschichtliche Christus. Eine Reihe von Vorträgen mit Quellenbeweis und Chronologie des Lebens Jesu. Third edition; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 32, (August 4, 1866), columns 841-845.

Ernst Renan: Les Apôtres; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 36 (September 1, 1866), columns 937-941.

Henri Lutteroth: Le recensement de Quirinius en Judée; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 39 (September 22, 1866), columns 1009-1011.

Jordan Bucher: Die Chronologie des Neuen Testamentes. Mit geschichtlichen, exegetischen und synoptischen Erörterungen; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 44 (October 27, 1866), columns 1130-1131.

Gustav Volkmar: Der Ursprung unserer Evangelien nach den Urkunden, laut den neuern Entdeckungen und Verhandlungen; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 45 (November 3, 1866), columns 1155-1156.

Carl Harder: Die Entstehung und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten, Part I; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 50 (December 8, 1866), columns 1313-1314.

Georg Benedikt Winer: Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Sprachidioms als sichere Grundlage der neutestamentlichen Exegese bearbeitet. Seventh edition; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 17 (April 20, 1867), column 457.

Hermann Sevin: Die drei ersten Evangelien, synoptisch zusammengestellt; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 17 (April 20, 1867), columns 457-458.

Carl Weizsäcker: Untersuchungen über die evangelische Geschichte, ihre Quellen und den Gang ihrer Entwicklung; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 18 (April 27, 1867), columns 481-485.

Johann Rudolf Erni: Evangelien - Übersicht; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 44 (October 26, 1867) columns 1209-1210.

Wilhelm Mangold: Der Römerbrief und die Anfänge der römischen Gemeinde. Eine kritische Untersuchung; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 45 (November 2, 1867), columns 1233-1236.

Johannes Kayser: Über den sogenannten Barnabas-Brief. Eine patristische Abhandlung; in Literariasches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 2 (January 4, 1868), columns 25-27.

Johann Heinrich Scholten: Die ältesten Zeugnisse betreffend die Schriften des Neuen Testamentes, historisch untersucht; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No, 26 (June 20, 1868), columns 689-690.

Arthur König: Die Echtheit der Apostelgeschichte des heiligen Lucas. Ein Wort an deren Gegner; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 27 (June 27, 1868), columns 713-714.

Theodor Zahn: Der Hirt des Hermas untersucht; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 12 (March 13, 1869), columns 313-316.

Carolus Ludovicus Wilibaldus Grimm: Lexicon Graeco-Latinum in Libros Novi Testamenti; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 15 (April 3, 1869), columns 409-410.

Carl Wittichen: Der geschichtliche Charakter des Evangeliums Johannis in Verbindung mit der Frage nach seinem Ursprunge. Eine kritische Untersuchung; in Literariasches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 30 (July 17, 1869), columns 865-866.

Jacob Freudenthal: Die Flavius Josephus beigelegte Schrift über die Herrschaft der Vernunft (IV Makkabäerbuch), eine Predigt aus dem I. nachchristlichen Jahrhundert, untersucht; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 45 (October 30, 1869), columns 1281-1282.

Ernst Renan: Saint Paul; and Ernst Renan: Paulus, Autorisierte deutsche Aufgabe; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 47 (November 13, 1869), columns 1344-1348.

Max Krenkel: Paulus der Apostel der Heiden. Vorträge gehalten in den Protestantenvereinen zu Dresden und Leipzig; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 11 (March 5, 1870), columns 265-267.

Hermann Sevin: Zur Chronologie des Lebens Jesu nach den Synoptikern. Eine Dissertation; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 32 (July 30, 1870), column 881.

Ludwig Noack: Das Senfkorn des Glaubens an Jesus Christus als den Gottessohn unter der weltgeschichtliche Wunderbaum des Evangeliums; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 16 (April 22, 1871), columns 393-395.

Johann Rudolf Tobler: Grundzüge der evangelischen Geschichte; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 18 (May 8, 1871), columns 449-450.

Heinrich Ziegler: Irenäus der Bischof von Lyon; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland (1872), columns 789ff.

Max Krenkel: Der Apostel Johannes; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland (1872), columns 909-910.

Rudolf Friedrich Grau: Entwicklungsgeschichte des neutestamentlichen Schrifttums, Vol. I; in Zeitschrift für wissenschaftlichen Theologie, XV (1872), pp. 439ff.

Aemilius Luebeck: Hieronymus quos noverit scriptores et ex quibus hauserit; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 2 (January 11, 1873), column 35.

Johannes Carolus Theodorus de Otto: Hermíae philosophi Irrisio gentilium philosophorum. Apologetarum Quadrati Aristidis Aristonis Militiadis Melitonis Apollinaris reliquiae; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 11 (March 15, 1873), columns 321-323.

Sexti sententiarum recensiones latinam graecam syriacas conjunctium exhibuit Johannes Gildemeister; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 52 (December 27, 1873), column 1644.

Theodor Zahn: Ignatius von Antiochen; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 1 (January 3, 1874), columns 1-6.

Adolf Harnack: Zur Quellenkritik der Geschichte des Gnosticismus; in Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland, No. 18 (May 2, 1874), columns 585-586.

Oscar von Gebhardt and Adolf Harnack, editors: Barnabae epistula, Clementis Romani epistula, etc.; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, I (1876), columns 336ff.

Benjamin Aubé: Histoire des persécutions de l'église jusqu'a'la fin des Antonins; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, I (1876), columns 446ff.

Adolf Hilgenfeld, editor: Clementis Romani epistulae, Mosis assumptionis quae supersunt collecta et illustrata; and Oscar von Gebhardt and Adolf Harnack, editors: Clementis Romani ad Corinthios quae dicuntur epistulae; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, II (1877), columns 284ff.

Wilhelm Selwyn, editor: Origensis Contra Celsum Libri I, II, III, IV; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, II (1877), column 477.

Oscar von Gebhardt and Adolf Harnack, editors: Hermae Pastor; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, III (1878), columns 281ff.

Bruno Bauer: Christus und die Caesaren, der Ursprung des Christentums aus dem römischen Griechentum; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, III (1878), columns 314ff.

Oscar von Gebhardt and Adolf Harnack, editors: Barnabae epistula, Clementis Romani epistula, etc. Second edition; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, III (1878), columns 531-532.

Benjamin Aubé: Histoire des persécutions de l'église, la polémique païenne à la fin du II^{e} Siècle; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, III (1878), columns 532ff.

Elysée Pélagaud: Étude sur Celse et la première escarmouche entre la philosophie antique et le christianisme naissant; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, IV (1879), columns 201ff.

Carl Merk: Clemens Alexandrinus in seiner Abhängigkeit von der griechischen Philosophie; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, IV (1879) columns 475ff.

William Bright, editor: Socrates' Ecclesiastical History; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, IV (1879), columns 478-479.

Moritz von Engelhardt: Das Christentums Justins des Märtyrers. Eine Untersuchung uber die Anfänge der katholischen Glaubenslehre; in Historische Zeitschrift, XLIV (1880), pp. 499-505.

Bruno Bauer: Das Urevangelium und die Gegner der Schrift: Christus und die Cäsaren; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, V (1880), columns 30-31.

Victor Schultze: Archäologische Studien über altchristliche Monumente; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, V (1880), columns 350ff.

Johannes Friedrich: Zur ältesten Geschichte des Primates in der Kirche; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, V (1880), columns 131ff.

Theodor Zahn: Acta Joannis; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, VI (1881), columns 31ff.

Karl Johannes Neumann, editor: Juliani imperatoris Librorum contra Christianos quae supersunt; and Karl Johannes Neumann, translator: Kaiser Julians Bucher gegen die Christen; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, VI (1881), columns 258ff.

Victor Ryssel: Gregorius Thaumaturgis; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, VI (1881), columns 283ff.

Joseph Langen: De commentariorum in epistolas Paulinas, qui Ambrosii, et quaestionum biblicarum, quae Augustini nomine feruntur, scriptore dissertatio; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, VI (1881), columns 371-372.

Theodor Keim: Rom und das Christentum; in Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen, I (1882), pp. 46-62.

Karl Schmidt: Die Apostelgeschichte under dem Hauptgeschichtspunkt ihrer Glaubwurdigkeit, Vol. I; in Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen, II (1882), pp. 1313-1328.

Johannes Dräseke: Der Brief an Diognetos; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, VII (1882), columns 28ff.

Theodor Zahn: Forschungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons und der altkirchlichen Literatur, Part I: Tations Diatessaron; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, VII (1882), columns 102ff.

Benjamin Aubé: Les chrétiens dans l'empire Romain de la fin den Antonins au milieu du III^{e} Siecle; and Benjamin Aubé: Étude sur un nouveau texte des Actes des martyrs Scillitains; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, VII (1882), columns 171ff.

Richard Adelbert Lipsius: Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und Apostellegenden, Vol. I; in Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen, II (1883), pp. 865-884.

Adolf Harnack: Die Uberlieferung der griechischen Apologeten des 2. Jahrhunderts in der alten Kirche und im Mittelalter; in Historische Zeitschrift, L (1883), pp. 461-472.

Henry Doulcet: Essai sur les rapports de l'église chretienne avec l'état Romain; in Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen, I (1884), pp. 361-369.

Eberhard Vischer: Die Offenbarung Johannis, eine jüdische Apokalypse in christlicher Bearbeitung; and Gerard Johann Weyland: Compilatie en Omwerkingshypothesen toegepast op de Apocalypse van Johannes; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, XII (1887), columns 28ff.

Albert Jahn: Des heiligen Eusthatius, Erzbischofs von Antiochen, Beurteilung des Origenes, betreffend die Auffassung der Wahrsagerin; in Theologische Literaturzeitung, XII (1887), columns 151ff.

Open Letters

"Eine Replik" [To Joseph Victor Widmann], Basler Nachrichten, September 14, 1903.

"Meine Antwort auf Frau Dr. Förster-Nietzsches neueste Publikationen, ihren Bruder betreffend," Frankfurter Zeitung, first morning edition, December 10, 1904.

Posthumous Works

"Erinnerungen an Friedrich Nietzsche," Die neue Rundschau (1906), pp. 209-231, 320-330.

Das Johannesevangelium: Studien zur Kritik seiner Erforschung. Edited by C. A. Bernoulli. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1911.

Vorgeschichte und Jugend der mittelalterlichen Scholastik: Eine kirchenhistorische Vorlesung. Edited by C. A. Bernoulli. Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1917.

Christentum und Kultur: Gedanken und Anmerkungen zur modernen Theologie. Edited by C. A. Bernoulli. Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1919.

Titus Flavius Clement of Alexandria, Die Teppiche (Stromateis). Translated by Franz Overbeck. Edited by C. A. Bernoulli and Ludwig Früchtel. Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1936.

Selbstbekenntnisse. Edited by Eberhard Vischer. Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1941.

Overbeckiana: Übersicht über den Franz-Overbeck-Nachlass der Universitätsbibliothek Basel, Volume II: Der wissenschaftliche Nachlass Franz Overbecks. Edited by Martin Tetz. Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1962.

Collected Letters

"Briefe an Peter Gast," Die neue Rundschau (1906), pp. 26-51.

Friedrich Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit Franz Overbeck. Edited by Richard Oehler and C. A. Bernoulli, Leipzig: Insel, 1916.

"Aus der Korrespondenz von A. E. Biedermann," edited by Paul Burckhardt, in Aus fünf Jahrhunderten schweizerischen Kirchengeschichte. (Commemorative publication of the University of Basel.) Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1932.

"Overbeckiana" [Letters to Adolf Hilgenfeld], edited by Helmut M. Pölcher, Zeitschrift fur Religions- und Geistgeschichte, VI, No. 1 (1954), pp. 49-64.

Overbeckiana: Übersicht über den Franz-Overbeck-Nachlass der Universitätsbibliothek Basel, Volume I: Die Korrespondenz Franz Overbecks. Edited by Ernst Staehelin. Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1962.

B. Books and Articles on Overbeck

Barth, Karl. Theology and Church, Shorter Writings, 1920-1928. Translated by Louise Pettibone Smith. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

Benz, Ernst. Nietzsches Ideen zur Geschichte des Christentum und der Kirche. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1956.

Bernoulli, Carl Albrecht. "Franz Overbeck," Basler Jahrbuch (1906), pp. 136-192.

Bernoulli, Carl Albrecht. Franz Overbeck und Friedrich Nietzsche: Eine Freundschaft. Two volumes. Jena: Eugen Diederich, 1908.

Havenstein, Martin. "Franz Overbeck: Ein tragisches Theologenschicksal," Die Tat, III, No. 7 (October, 1911), pp. 325-338; and Die Tat, III, No. 8 (November, 1911), pp. 389-403.

His, Eduard. Basler Gelehrte des 19. Jahrhundert. Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1941.

Jentsch, Carl. "Overbeck und Treitschke," Die Grenzboten, LXVII, No. 34 (August 20, 1908), pp. 368-379.

Joël, Karl. "Franz Overbeck," Die neue Rundschau (1905), pp. 1145-1146.

Löwith, Karl. From Hegel to Nietzsche. Translated by David E. Green. Garden City: Doubleday, 1967.

Nigg, Walter. Franz Overbeck: Versuch einer Würdigung. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1931.

Schindler, Hans. Barth und Overbeck: Ein Betrag zur Genesis der dialektischen Theologie im Lichte der gegenwärtigen theologischen Situation. Gotha: Leopold Klotz, 1936.

Schmidt, Paul Wilhelm. "De Wette - Overbecks Werk zur Apostelgeschichte und dessen jüngste Bestreitung," Festschrift zur Feier des 450jährigen Bestehens der Universität Basel. Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1910.

Staehelin, Andreas (ed.). Professoren der Universität Basel aus fünf Jahrhunderten: Bildnisse und Würdigungen. Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1960.

Tetz, Martin. "Über Formengeschichte in der Kirchengeschichte," Theologische Zeitschrift, XVII, No. 6 (November-December, 1961), pp. 413-431.

Vielhauer, Philipp, "Franz Camille Overbeck," Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, IV, columns 1750-1752. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1960.

C. Other Primary Works

Burckhardt, Jakob. Force and Freedom. Edited by James Hastings Nichols. New York: Meridian Books, 1955.

Clifford, W. K. Lectures and Essays, Volume II. London: Macmillan, 1901.

Hartmann, Eduard von. Die Selbstzersetzung des Christenthums und die Religion der Zukunft. Berlin: Carl Duncker, 1874.

Lagarde, Paul de. Deutsche Schriften. Munich: J. F. Lehmanns, 1937.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. Werke in drei Bänden. Munich: Carl Hanser, 1955.

_____. Friedrich Nietzsches Gesammelte Briefe, Volume II: Friedrich Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit E. Rohde. Edited by Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche and Fritz Schöll. Leipzig: Insel, 1903.

_____. Friedrich Nietzsches Gesammelte Briefe, Volume IV: Friedrich Nietzsches Briefe an Peter Gast. Edited by Peter Gast. Leipzig: Insel, 1908.

_____. The Nietzsche-Wagner Correspondence. Edited by Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche. Translated by Caroline V. Kerr. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1921.

Pascal, Blaise. Pensées. Translated by W. F. Trotter. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958.

Stirner, Max. Der Einzige und sein Eigentum. Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1901.

Strauss, David Friedrich. Der alte und der neue Glaube: Ein Bekenntnis. Bonn: Emil Strauss, 1879.

Treitschke, Heinrich von. Aufsätze, Reden und Briefe. Five volumes. Edited by Karl Martin Schiller. Meersburg: F. W. Hendel, 1929.

_____. Heinrich von Treitschkes Briefe. Three volumes. Edited by Max Cornicelius. Leipzig: G. Hirzel, 1914-1920.

D. Other Secondary Works

Bonjour, Edgar. Die Universität Basel von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart. Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1960.

Brinton, Crane. Nietzsche. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941.

Burckhardt, Paul. Geschichte der Stadt Basel von der Zeit der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart. Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1942.

Dorpalen, Andreas. Heinrich von Treitschke. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.

Elert, Werner. Der Kampf um das Christentum: Geschichte der Beziehungen zwischen dem evangelischen Christentum im Deutschland und dem allgemeinen Denken seit Schleiermacher und Hegel. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1921.

Förster-Nietzsche, Elizabeth. The Life of Nietzsche. Two volumes. Translated by Anthony M. Ludovici and Paul V. Cohn. New York: Sturgis and Walton, 1912-1915.

Glick, G. Wayne. The Reality of Christianity: A Study of Adolf von Harnack. New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

Heller, Erich. The Disinherited Mind: Essays in Modern German Literature and Thought. Cleveland: World, 1961.

Hodgson, Peter C. The Formation of Historical Theology: A Study of Ferdinand Christian Baur. New York: Harper and Row, 1966.

Jaspers, Karl. Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity. Translated by Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1965.

Kaufmann, Walter. From Shakespeare to Existentialism. Garden City: Doubleday, 1960.

_____. Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist. Cleveland: World, 1965.

Lougee, Robert W. Paul de Lagarde: A Study in Radical Conservatism in Germany. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.

Löwith, Karl. Meaning in History. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

Podach, Erich F. The Madness of Nietzsche. Translated by F. A. Voigt. London and New York: Putnam, 1931.

Salin, Edgar. Jakob Burckhardt und Nietzsche. Basel: Verlag der Universitätsbibliothek, 1938.

Steinhausen, Georg. Deutsche Geistes- und Kulturgeschichte von 1870 bis zur Gegenwart. Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1931.

Stephan, Horst. Geschichte der deutschen evangelischen Theologie seit dem deutschen Idealismus. Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1960.

Stern, Fritz. The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology. Garden City: Doubleday, 1965.

Tillich, Paul. Perspectives on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Protestant Theology. New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

Troeltsch, Ernst. Gesammelte Schriften, Volume III: Der Historismus und seine Probleme, Book I: Das logische Problem der Geschichtsphilosophie. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1922.

Wagar, W. Warren (ed.). European Intellectual History since Darwin and Marx. New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

Wendland, D. Johannes. Hermann von der Goltz in Basel (1865/1873) und die kirchlich-theologischen Kämpfe seiner Zeit: Ein Zeitbild aus dem Basel des vorigen Jahrhunderts. Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1933.

Werner, Martin. Der protestantische Weg des Glaubens, Volume I: Der Protestantismus als geschichtliches Problem. Bern: Paul Haupt, 1955.

Zahn-Harnack, Agnes von. Adolf von Harnack. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1951.